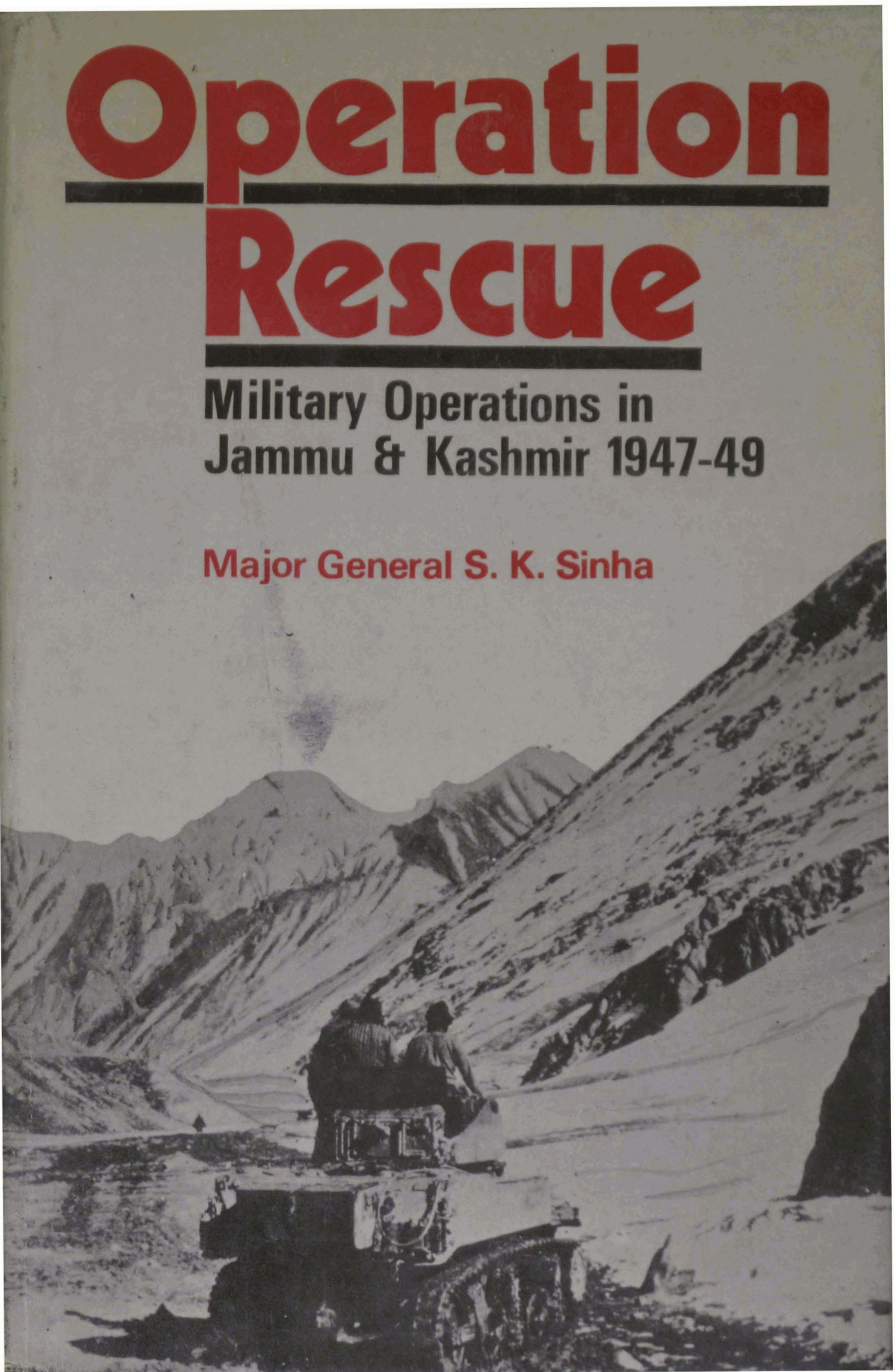
Operation Rescue

Military Operations in Jammu & Kashmir 1947-49

Major General S. K. Sinha



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OPERATION RESCUE
Military Operations in J & K 1947-49

Only two months after India attained independence, the State of Jammu & Kashmir was invaded by tribal hordes followed by a regular military invasion. Military operations in this theatre lasted for over one year and ended with a ceasefire in January 1949. These operations have had a long hangover, affecting peace on the Indian subcontinent for the last three decades, during which period this State has been the scene of short and sharp military conflicts in 1965 and 1971.

This is the first ever published authentic account covering the entire military campaign in Kashmir from 1947 to 1949, written by an officer closely connected with these operations. This narrative has been blended with personal reminiscences and written in a very readable form for the general public. Apart from the gripping narrative of the operations, the author has also provided a good insight into the peculiar problems of operating at high altitude.

In his foreword to this book, General K. M. Cariappa, the first Indian Commander-in-Chief, has said:

"This is a very well written book, with no political colour attached to it at all. It is a narrative of facts and events. The author has given an honest and true picture of the operations in Jammu & Kashmir...I hope every officer and every military library in our country will have a copy of this excellent book."

Operation Rescue

Military operations in Jammu & Kashmir
1947-49

Major S.K. Sinha
(Now Major -General)

Vision Books

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Dedicated to
the evergreen memory of
the brave soldiers and airmen of India
who gave their lives so that
their countrymen in Jammu and Kashmir
may live in freedom

Foreword

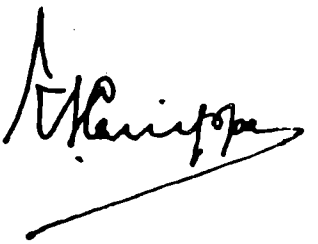
I AM HAPPY to write a Foreword to this excellent book *Operation Rescue*. The whole show was in fact a "Rescue" to rescue the simple people of Jammu and Kashmir, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Hindus—in the early phase, from the ravages of the plundering mania of the "raiders" who swarmed into the beautiful Kashmir Valley in thousands from across our neighbouring dominion, burning, looting and outraging the modesty of innocent women there, regardless of their class and religion, and not long after their attacks, by regular troops from Pakistan. This is a very well written book with no political colour attached to it at all. It is a narrative of facts and events. The author has given an honest and true picture of the operations in Jammu and Kashmir. He has brought out some useful and helpful lessons which I am sure will be a valuable addition to the professional knowledge of all ranks in our Defence Services.

If any evidence is required to prove that there was NO pre-planning of any kind at all to occupy Kashmir militarily, as some prejudiced people still accuse India of having had, this book gives that evidence quite convincingly to anyone who has an honest and open mind about this problem. I am particularly interested in this book as, for a whole year of these operations from January 1948 until the "Cease-fire" in January 1949, I was in over-all command of them and so I have a full picture of our fighting there and of the many tactical and administrative problems that confronted the various subordinate commanders and which problems they, one and all, tackled so efficiently. Major Sinha has given a graphic description in a readable form of the battles fought, by our gallant officers and men

over that very difficult terrain under such trying climatic conditions.

"Operation Rescue" was the first operation our Army and Air Force were called upon to undertake so soon after we got our Independence. Almost every one of the officers there had little or no experience of the high commands they held but I know very intimately how splendidly every one rose to the occasion and did his stuff magnificently. The men were superb under their junior leaders—the Junior Commissioned and Non-Commissioned officers. Even the non-combatants were inspired, by the sacred and just cause we had for being in Kashmir at the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, to do their work courageously and selflessly.

I hope every officer and every military library in our country will have a copy of this excellent book.



General
Commander-in-Chief Indian Army
(1949 to 1953)

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Air Commodore Mehar Singh, DSO. He was in command of the Air Force employed in Jammu and Kashmir

Brigadier L.P. Sen, DSO, Commander 161 Infantry Brigade which routed the enemy in the battle of Shalatang and advanced from Srinagar to Uri

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Preface

ON THE 27th of October 1947, the Indian Army was ordered to the rescue of Kashmir, which had been the victim of a brutal and barbarous invasion from a "sister dominion". This book is an attempt to place on record the heroic story of the exploits of those gallant soldiers and airmen, who gave their lives defending Jammu and Kashmir, and of their comrades-in-arms who survived them. I have endeavoured to blend this narrative with a measure of personal reminiscence and have stuck to things as I saw them and of which I have first hand knowledge.

I was associated with these operations in the capacity of a junior staff officer and have no decisions to justify nor any kudos to claim. I can, however, claim to be the only general staff officer who had continuous service with Headquarters, Western Command, from the commencement of these operations to well after the cease-fire. And it was this headquarters which was directing operations in this theatre throughout the campaign. This gave me an opportunity of witnessing many of the highlights of these operations and of being 'in the know' of things. It also gave me an opportunity of almost invariably accompanying the three successive Army Commanders—Generals Russell, Cariappa and Shrinagesh—in their tours of the operational areas. Thus I could acquire a personal knowledge of the 'fighting line'.

One often hears conflicting views regarding the operations in Kashmir. Some talk of them in terms of a police

action, whereas others regard them as a major campaign. In actual fact they were neither, and those who consider them in terms of one or the other, have not correctly evaluated these operations. Even at our Staff College, the Mecca of military training, I found that these operations were referred to as internal security, that is, police duties.* It is only right that such misconceptions be eradicated and these operations studied in their correct perspective. Hence the justification for this book.

These operations ultimately involved the employment of nearly 90,000 Indian troops, on a terrain unprecedented for modern warfare. The enemy opposing us was no less strong, albeit with no offensive air support. He had heavy anti-aircraft and medium guns in addition to the normal field and mountain artillery, all of which he used with skill and precision. We were up against regular forces, similarly organised and trained, who only a little while earlier, formed part of the same undivided Indian Army. And in this fighting lasting over a year, we lost 1,500 precious lives. Our other casualties were 3,500 wounded and 1,000 missing/prisoners making a total of 6,000. The enemy on the other hand is estimated to have suffered 20,000 casualties of whom about 6,000 were killed. It would not therefore be right to dub these operations as a mere police action. Yet it would not at the same time be correct to maintain that the Kashmir war stands comparison with any major campaign in the Second World War. Compared to any of these campaigns, the fighting here was restricted and the use of modern weapons not so extensive. Moreover, a large portion of the enemy comprised irregular troops who often adopted guerilla tactics.

These operations were a local war which brought out some useful lessons on mountain warfare, particularly of fighting on snow-capped hills. Although it will not be right for us to base all our tactical doctrines on our experiences in this theatre, we in the Indian Army can ill afford to ignore the lessons we learnt here because the Great Himalayas extend across over 2,000 miles of our northern fron-

* This was in 1952.

tiers.† I have also endeavoured to reflect on some of the problems which the special conditions of terrain in this area present to the soldier and have incorporated these reflections in an appendix to this book. I have, however, confined myself in these reflections to the level with which I can claim to be familiar—the level of the company commander.

I seek my reader's indulgence for any minor discrepancies that may have crept into the narrative of these operations. Although I did have some notes to assist me in writing this book, I often had to rely on my memory of events that took place nearly eight years ago. Under these circumstances, some lapses are inevitable.

This book contains a soldier's story of the fighting that took place in Jammu and Kashmir, and does not delve into the political aspects of the problem. The latter is obviously outside its scope and beyond my competence. Finally, I wish to emphasise that this book is not an official history of the Kashmir campaign and that the comments and conclusions contained herein are entirely my own.

Jammu & Kashmir
15th May, 1955 SKS

POSTSCRIPT

I wrote this book over 20 years ago but for certain reasons, I could not publish it earlier. Although I have made no changes to my original draft, I have tried to bring it up-to-date by adding footnotes at appropriate places.

New Delhi
1st September, 1975 SKS

† This was written in the era of "*Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai*"—many years before our northern borders became a live frontier for the first time in our long and ancient history.

1

To Delhi

ON OUR return from overseas in August 1946, we found disorder let loose in Calcutta, the port of our disembarkation. The Army had been called out in aid of the civil power and our patrols were operating in the curfew clamped city. Some of these troops, I recognised, were our comrades from Indonesia. One could not but feel sad at this spectacle. These troops had fought so gallantly in Burma and thereafter for a further year in Indonesia. Service in Indonesia had been an unpleasant assignment, for in the garb of disarming the Japanese and evacuating allied prisoners, we had been virtually employed to reimpose Dutch imperialism on that country. The present task, however, was still more unpleasant as it involved shooting down our own misguided countrymen. One hoped for a better home-coming for the Indian soldier, but that was not to be.

Momentous events were taking place at Delhi and our first popular government was soon to be ushered into power. The government had to rely increasingly on its Army to maintain law and order in the country. A little later, the Army had to meet the invading hordes in Kashmir from across the border. Personal comforts would inevitably have to be ignored in this emergency and the Indian soldier would have to buckle himself for a prolonged period of continuous field service.

Soon after disembarkation, I proceeded home on my month's overseas leave. Whilst on leave, I received a

telegram posting me as General Staff Officer—Grade 3 in MO Directorate at General Headquarters, Delhi. Not being well up in abbreviations, I was at a loss to know what MO stood for. In the battalion we used MO as an abbreviation for medical officer and I was wondering why a layman like me had been summoned to the directorate of "medicos". Moreover, I felt it most unlikely that an officer with barely three years service, as I then had, would be required to serve at General Headquarters. I concluded that someone must have made a mistake. I therefore sought both clarification and confirmation from Delhi. I received a curt reply "your posting orders stand and are quite clear". MO, as I later discovered, was the abbreviation for military operations! And so in September 1946, I arrived in Delhi. I found that MO directorate was considered the holiest of the holy in General Headquarters. For the previous 100 years or more, it had been the exclusive preserve of British personnel—both among officers and clerks. In the process of Indianisation three Indian officers had recently been posted to this directorate about the same time—Lieutenant Colonel SHFJ Manekshaw,* Major Yahya Khan† and myself. Neither having the necessary length of service nor having then graduated from a Staff College, I felt most unequal to my appointment. The complicated Whitehall filing system and the awe-inspiring name plates of senior officers that flanked the dark corridors of the Imperial Secretariat further accentuated this complex. However, be that as it may, I could not help feeling that I was lucky in having come to Delhi, for great things were in the air and I would see history enacted during the next few years.

The particular section of MO I had been posted to, dealt with Internal Security. Seldom before had the army been used so extensively for Internal Security and we naturally found ourselves extremely busy. The Calcutta riots had been followed by the Noakhali affair and then the carnage in Bihar, my home province. I remember that one of my

*Later, Field Marshal and Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army.
†Later, President of Pakistan.

duties in those days was to flag locations of units on the map in the room of the Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck. I used to do this early in the morning well before the Chief came to his office. One morning he came earlier than usual and he saw me flagging the map. This was the first time I had met a Field Marshal and I felt a little nervous. Auk noticed my embarrassment and in a friendly tone said, "So you flag these maps for me." He then asked me some personal questions and on my telling him that I came from Bihar, he remarked, "Your chaps have been rather naughty. Look at all the killings going on there." That was the first and last time I met the Chief on whose staff, with several hundred other officers, I served for nearly a year, yet he appeared to have remembered this brief encounter. A week later I was told that the "young Captain from Bihar" was required to accompany the Chief on his flight over the riot-affected areas of Bihar. A young officer normally does not relish the idea of accompanying such a senior officer on a tour, and to say the least, I felt most uneasy. Although I come from Bihar, I do not claim to know the names of all the villages of my State. I spent a whole night studying the map and memorising all the obscure names of places we were likely to fly over. Luckily, however, I was told the next day that the tour was cancelled and I could breathe a sigh of relief!

These riots did not stop with Bihar. Like wild fire they spread westward, steadily gaining momentum. Garhmukhteshwar, Peshawar and Rawalpindi were now affected. The peak fury, however, was reached in the Punjab where communal passions were in full flood. In June 1947, partition was announced but the riots continued unabated, if anything, their ferocity had increased.

At General Headquarters apart from flagging maps, preparing reports and issuing instructions, we also partitioned ourselves. A portion of the directorate had to go to Pakistan to form the nucleus for the MO Directorate of the new Pakistan Army. Even the old files dating back to the 1857 Mutiny and earlier had to be divided between India and Pakistan. Alongwith an officer earmarked for Pakis-

tan, I was sent to our Records Section at Simla for a week to divide several thousands of these files. Of course it was impossible for the two of us to do full justice to our assignment in so short a period. However, we did somehow manage to complete our task, and what was more, we did so in complete amity. In the process a large number of old files had to be destroyed.

Having had a strenuous year as a staff officer, I longed for a change to regimental duty. I applied for a posting back to my regiment. My request was turned down and I had to serve another four years on the staff before I could revert to regimental duty. I was offered the appointment of General Staff Officer—Grade 2 (Operations) in a new Command Headquarters that was to be set up in Delhi. As this meant a promotion when I was not due for one and when I least expected it, I could not have any reasonable grievance.

The Punjab Boundary Force comprising both Indian and Pakistani troops had failed as an experiment. With effect from 1st September 1947, the two dominions assumed direct responsibility for the maintenance of law and order in their respective parts of the Punjab. In India, we first had two independent areas, Delhi Independent Area and East Punjab Independent Area, but a fortnight later, an operational Command Headquarters was set up to command both these Areas. This Command was to be known as Delhi and East Punjab Command and Lieutenant General Sir Dudley Russell, KBE, CB, DSO, MC was designated its commander. The new Command was to have only a skeleton staff. The headquarters was to be located at New Delhi but when away from New Delhi, in a special train comprising coaches of the old Viceregal Train which had been placed at its disposal.

On the 14th of September 1947 I lent a hand in rolling off Army Headquarters Operation Instruction No 2 addressed to General Russell. He was given the task of restoring law and order in Delhi and East Punjab and controlling the evacuation of refugees from these parts. The following day, I acted as courier of this instruction to the General and took with me my posting orders to serve on

his staff.

Although at times I felt tired and frustrated working behind those massive walls of the Secretariat, where things often moved in a proverbially slow manner, it was not without a pang that I left my old directorate and several old friends. I carried memories of some hectic and exciting time. There had been occasions when we had been constantly on our toes and had kept night long vigils. I remember one such instance when we had to prepare a large map showing the location of all units of the Indian Army. One of us by mistake had shown proposed locations on this map as against the actual locations as they then were. We discovered this mistake late the previous evening when we were breaking off for the day and this map had to be got ready for an emergency meeting of the Cabinet presided over by Lord Mountbatten, early in the morning on the following day. There was consternation amongst us. When we sheepishly brought our error to the notice of our boss, Colonel Manekshaw, expecting him to explode at us, he merely smiled and said, "Sweety, you have the whole night before you." We spent the night in the Viceroy's House putting up a new map and flagging locations. The Governor-General's staff, however, was very considerate and having a few Defence Security Corps armed sentries throughout the night.

I also remember that in those riot-torn days we used to move about armed at all times. On one occasion I had to move out of my office in South Block armed with my pistol and having a few Defence Security Corps armed sentries with me to disperse a rioting crowd near the Secretariat. The "magistrate" with me was Mr. Dundas, the Defence Secretary, who was to continue in the same appointment in Pakistan. And then like Muhammad Tughlak shifting his capital, we moved our Army Headquarters from South Block to the Red Fort and back again to South Block within a month. In retrospect I now feel that these were certainly unusual experiences for a staff officer of Army Headquarters. The old General Headquarters formation sign which we then wore on our arms (the five-pointed star against a red and blue background) brings back to me

memories of such hectic days. In passing I may mention that someone had started the joke that this sign represented, "the Star of India rising out of an ocean of blue ink into a sky of red tape" and I confess that in certain respects this analogy was not far wrong. However, in those troubled times we had more than the normal share of excitement which is so unusual for the placid and tranquil life of a staff officer at Army Headquarters. Anyway, I had now said good-bye to the rather static life at Army Headquarters and I was now to be in a mobile headquarters which would move on a special train.

With an old pair of crowns on my shoulders (these were my grandfather's police crowns—silver plated but turned yellow through age, and could therefore be used by an army officer), I reported to my new commander, General Russell, in his office. He sat in a bare room with hardly any furniture, perhaps thinking of the new responsibilities that had devolved upon him. A distinguished soldier of the last war, he had commanded the famous Eighth Indian Division throughout the Italian campaign. His division had earned a great name in the Allied armies for its famous river crossing operations and he had rightly chosen his divisional motto, "One more river". The obstacles that now faced him were more difficult than those Italian rivers but he was confident of success. A few months earlier he had successfully discharged a somewhat similar responsibility as Commander of the Fifth Indian Division during the Bihar riots. However, there was no gainsaying that his new task was stupendous and his resources limited. He had to build the edifice of a new Command charged with such grave responsibilities and he had a bare half a dozen officers on his staff. The normal compliment for such a headquarters is nearly one hundred officers.

Russell welcomed me to his staff and at once struck a personal note. I soon discovered matters of common interest with my new commander. Having just come from Bihar, he knew many parts of my home province. He had served in the Intelligence Bureau before the last war and knew my father who was then in the Bureau in the Central Secretariat. Another link lay in the fact that he too in his

younger days, over twenty years ago, had served in the directorate from which I had just come. The result of this brief interview was that I came out of his room full of loyalty and enthusiasm for my new commander. And these are essential ingredients in the relationship between the staff and its commander.

My first task at the new headquarters was to get some furniture for our offices, particularly for the Army Commander's room and to set up an Operations Room. In those days of transition it would have taken a long time to obtain the necessary furniture and stationery if one followed the normal official procedure. I had, therefore, to exploit my Army Headquarters connections and do a lot of "scrounging". I did both, but my difficulty in the beginning was to convince some people of the existence of our headquarters! An irate civilian officer of the office of Chief Administrative Officer vehemently protested that no Government notification had been issued nor necessary financial approval accorded to the setting up of the alleged Command I claimed to represent. He appeared most reluctant to accept my plea that seldom if ever was an emergency declared with prior financial concurrence! However, we did ultimately manage to get all our essential requirements. Our offices were soon set up, the furniture and fittings being very austere compared to the air-cooled and carpeted rooms of Army Headquarters in the Secretariat. But we prided in this austerity for we were an operational and mobile headquarters designed for emergency work.

Approximately three infantry divisions were deployed on Internal Security duties in Delhi and East Punjab when the new Command came into being. Troops were operating in the interior of almost all districts of the Punjab. The civil administration in these parts had virtually ceased to exist and we had almost completely taken over responsibility for the maintenance of law and order. The Punjab Emergency Act gave the Army wide powers of search and arrest. Apart from ensuring the security of life and property of the people, we also had to escort large numbers of refugees both by foot and on train. Mass migrations on a scale unprecedented in history were in progress

and escorting these large refugee columns to the Pakistan border was indeed a very difficult problem. The trains carried eight to ten thousand refugees each (most of them packed in goods wagons) and the foot columns often extended upto 30 miles in length. There had been several unfortunate incidents and these poor refugees had been attacked time and again both in India and in Pakistan.

Russell was determined to implement the Government's firm decision of affording maximum security to the Muslims in India. He evolved a fool-proof drill for the protection of the Muslim refugee trains. The main line from Delhi to the border in Amritsar was divided into five sectors with a brigade responsible for each sector. These brigades were responsible for enforcing curfew near railway stations and railway tracks when the refugee trains passed. They also provided mobile infantry and armoured car patrols along the Grand Trunk Road which runs parallel to and in close proximity of the railway track. The patrols kept pace with the trains and their assistance was readily available in the event of any trouble. A separate force known as the Railway Protection Force including Mahar machine-gunners was formed with headquarters at Red Fort, Delhi. This force was responsible for providing close protection to the refugee trains. There were open flats at suitable intervals in the train on which machine-guns were mounted on fixed lines to cover both sides of the compartments. To make matters further secure, all the windows of compartments carrying refugees were covered with barbed wire to prevent intruders jumping in or throwing any country-made bombs. In addition, an aircraft flew overhead to reconnoitre the railway track and give early warning of any approaching crowds or of sabotage. As far as I remember, not a single refugee train was attacked with any success after we implemented this plan. The protection of the 30 miles long foot columns, however, presented much greater difficulties. Stray assaults against these columns could not be completely eliminated but their incidence was greatly reduced by these vigorous protective measures.

Such then was the background against which our new

headquarters had been formed and against which we undertook to go to the rescue of the people of Kashmir. Soon after the headquarters was set up, we started the first of our several tours by train. I was asked to prepare an operation order for this move but I was not quite sure how to word the intention* paragraph as the Army Commander's programme was rather fluid. After a good deal of thinking, I wrote, "The Command train will proceed to wherever the Army Commander directs." The General smiled when he read this and asked, "What if I direct the train to Timbuctoo?" I replied, "We shall endeavour to take it there, Sir." And so for want of a better intention, the intention as worded by me was allowed to remain unaltered in the first operation order issued by our headquarters!

Our Command train was a very elaborate affair. We were completely self-contained and we travelled all over riot-torn Punjab in this train. A platoon from the escort company travelled in a compartment near the engine. This was followed by interconnected saloons with a corridor running from one end to the other. Behind these we had some compartments for our Other Ranks—clerks, drivers, orderlies and signallers, and then the flats for our motor vehicles and wireless sets. At the tail end travelled the remainder of the escort company. Intercommunication on the train was provided by a telephone system which was linked on the remote control to wireless sets. Once, while travelling between Jullundur and Amritsar, I spoke from my telephone in my compartment, to Delhi on the wireless. Reception was perfect and there were none of the obstructions one might fear on a moving train.

Our tours of the riot-affected areas were not confined to train moves only. The General also toured extensively by road. I remember accompanying him once in his Humber on his tour of Rohtak and Gurgaon districts. We met

*The main task or purpose of an operation is reflected in the intention paragraph of an operation order. Terminologies have now changed. What used to be referred to as intention previously is now called mission.

several units on that day and amongst them also was the First Battalion of The Sikh Regiment (1 Sikh) at Gurgaon. One could not but be struck by the self-confidence shown by the Commanding Officer of this battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai. His bearing was scrupulously correct and at the same time very dignified. We spent the evening with him and Russell talked to his officers and men. He could not, however, see the whole battalion that day as some companies were out on detachment. He appeared visibly impressed with all that he saw. Later in the car, he specifically mentioned this to me and added that a battalion reflects the personality of its commander. I am afraid we could not continue the conversation much further as the General was not in his best mood when he discovered that the vehicle following us with his kit had lost its way! Anyway, we shall presently see how this visit appears to have influenced him in selecting a battalion for a very important assignment.

2

Srinagar Saved

BY THE end of October 1947, the situation in Delhi and East Punjab was fast reverting to normal. With the improving situation, we at the headquarters felt that we could now allow ourselves the luxury of breaking off early in the evenings. Accordingly on 26th October 1947, I left my office soon after dusk to keep a social engagement, my first one after several weeks. While I was at a party in the Delhi Gymkhana Club, I was summoned post haste to the headquarters. A staff car had been chasing me all over and had ultimately located me.

By about 10 p.m., the eight of us who then comprised the staff of the headquarters had assembled in the Operations Room. We all realised that there must be something very serious for us to be so summoned at that hour, yet we were completely in the dark as to what it was all about. The Army Commander had gone for briefing to Army Headquarters. Major General Rajendra Singhji,* DSO, General Officer Commanding, Delhi Area, had also been called for this conference and he soon joined us. A little later the Army Commander returned and our meeting started. Of all the military conferences I have attended, this was by far the most momentous, but in appearance, it looked completely non-martial. Most of us were dressed in our dinner jackets and to add colour to our costumes, the duty officer was in his pyjama suit! He had dropped his

* Later General and Commander-in-Chief, Indian Army.

food over his uniform which was still not dry and as such he had no other alternative. I remember we were dressed more like the executives of a theatrical company rather than army officers in a planning conference hardly eight hours before the launching of a military campaign.

Russell started the meeting with the grave announcement that Jammu and Kashmir State had acceded to the Indian Union and that our Command had been given the task of defending the State against the invading tribesmen from Pakistan. I dare say we were all taken unawares as we had never visualised the sudden extension of our Command's territorial limits to include the State of Jammu and Kashmir nor had we visualised such a fighting role given to us at such short notice. I doubt if Russell himself had received any previous notice of his new commitments.

Being the secretary of the meeting, I had the unenviable task of taking down the minutes. I can still recall some of the important decisions arrived at, that night. These were as follows:

(a) Our headquarters would directly conduct operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

(b) Troops would be despatched to that State the next morning—one battalion group by air to Srinagar and one brigade group by road to Jammu. Our strength in Srinagar Valley was to be built up to one brigade group before the onset of winter.

(c) Director General, Civil Aviation, would requisition all available civilian dakotas and place them at our disposal for air movement.

(d) I was to be responsible for arranging despatch of troops by air from Delhi till a Rear Airfield Maintenance Organisation was formed. In this I was to be assisted by some officers to be made available by Delhi Area.

(e) An operation instruction as directed by the Army Commander was to be prepared immediately and delivered by a staff officer to the battalion commander being flown to Srinagar.

Before the meeting broke off we had sent emergency signals to 1 Sikh and 50 Parachute Brigade selected for Srinagar and Jammu, respectively. The signal to 1 Sikh read something like this:

> YOUR BATTALION LESS TWO COMPANIES WILL CONCENTRATE PALAM AIRFIELD BY 0400 HOURS 27 OCTOBER (.) ONE BATTERY 13 FIELD REGIMENT IN INFANTRY ROLE BEING PLACED UNDER YOUR COMMAND (.) BE PREPARED TO FLY ON AN OPERATIONAL MISSION EX PALAM MORNING 27 OCTOBER (.) REMAINDER BATTALION WILL BE FLOWN 28 OCTOBER (.) OPERATION INSTRUCTION WILL BE HANDED OVER AT AIRFIELD (.) AMMUNITION RATIONS AND WARM CLOTHING WILL BE ISSUED AT AIRFIELD UNDER ARRANGEMENTS THIS HEADQUARTERS

Only a fortnight earlier I had accompanied the Army Commander on his visit to 1 Sikh and I was wondering how Rai, their Commanding Officer, would react to the signal we had sent him. Imagine yourself a battalion commander receiving such orders at the middle of the night without any previous warning whatsoever and when some of your companies are out on detachment over a radius of 50 miles. It was indeed a difficult assignment but the Army Commander had specially selected this battalion and they were soon to justify this selection.

After the meeting broke off, Lieutenant Colonel Mac Conachie, the GSO 1, and I jointly got down to drafting an operation instruction to Rai. The intelligence then available to us was scanty and I reproduce below extracts from the "information" paragraph of the instruction issued to Rai :

> *1.* Kashmir has acceded to the Indian Union and Sheikh Abdullah has been invited to form a popular Government.
> *2.* Tribesmen, numbers and arms unknown but reliably reported to be in large numbers, are reported moving to Srinagar from the Western and North-Western areas of the State. Situation in Srinagar reliably reported on 26th October to be deteriorating.

I wished we could give Rai more definite information regarding the enemy, but lack of enemy intelligence was one of the several handicaps we had to contend with at that stage. We were not even sure about the fate of Srinagar; for ought we knew the enemy might already have captured the city. This instruction, therefore, also included the following orders:

> If wireless communication between you and Srinagar Civil Aviation Centre is not established and you are not given the land signal, you will not land at Srinagar but go to Jammu and land there... In the event of landing at Jammu... you will requisition local transport and send a reconnaissance on the route to Srinagar as close to Srinagar as it can go with safety and secure the route as far north from Jammu as possible.

After this instruction had been approved by the Army Commander, I rushed off to Palam* airport to receive 1 Sikh and to deliver a copy of the instruction to Rai. I arrived at Palam at about 3 a.m., an hour before the Sikhs were expected. With the cooperation of the aerodrome officials and some officers from Delhi Area we started making arrangements for receiving the battalion. The aerodrome was floodlit to facilitate loading and we had tea ready for the troops. Ammunition, rations and ordnance stores were stacked at the airfield for issue to the unit. We were racing against time but fortunately things somehow worked all right and we had everything ready by the time Rai and his men arrived.

I handed over the operation instruction to Rai and together we discussed it in the lounge of the aerodrome over a cup of tea. He read it with great care and asked for certain clarifications, some of which I was able to give. The others I told him would have to await the arrival of Brigadier Mellsop, the Brigadier General Staff who was to come to the airport to see off the troops. I had been asked

*Troops were flown from Palam Airport on 27 October 1947. From 28 October onwards these flights were organised from Willingdon (Safdarjang) airport.

to emphasise the tasks given to him by the Army Commander. These were personally drafted by him and were as follows :

You will—

(a) secure Srinagar airport and civil aviation wireless station;

(b) take such action, as your first task and available troops allow, to—

(i) drive tribesmen away from Srinagar;

(ii) aid the local government in the maintenance of law and order in Srinagar.

The great importance of Srinagar airport to us at this stage was obvious. All reinforcements and supplies to troops in the Valley had to go by air. The land route was both very difficult and slow. Srinagar was about 300 miles from the railhead at Pathankot, connected by a very indifferent road, fit only for occasional tourist traffic. Several rivers on this road had to be forded and the road also went over high mountain ranges. The Banihal Pass, 9000 feet high, through which this road entered the Srinagar valley would soon be blocked with snow as October was nearly over and winter was fast approaching.* Russell, therefore, had in the first instance emphasised the need for securing the airfield to facilitate further operations. As for the civil wireless station at the airfield, that was to be our only means of communication for the first few days until our heavy wireless sets could be sent to Srinagar.

After issuing his own orders promptly, Rai requested me to help his second in command in preparing the aircraft load tables. He complained that he was rather tired and said that he would have his "forty winks" on the sofa in the lounge while we made the necessary preparations. I must mention here that his calmness was indeed inspiring. He showed no excitement or agitation and appeared,

*Banihal Tunnel had not been constructed and all traffic used to go across the Pass in those days.

as always, supremely self-confident. With my little experience of war, I am convinced that calmness and self-confidence during stress and strain are very important assets for a good leader. Self-confidence in a leader is contagious, it soon spreads among the led, and a self-confident fighting team is a battle winning factor.

We finished the preliminaries and it was now time for the troops to depart. They all looked very cheerful and we wished them good luck and good hunting. They got into their respective aircraft and soon the dakotas started warming their engines. One after the other, the planes started taking off. As the last dakota was airborne in the grey twilight of that early dawn, I felt a sense of great satisfaction. We had been able to accomplish what at first seemed so difficult—the despatch of troops in so short a time. The noise of the dakota engines now started growing fainter in the distance and I turned to go back to the office to await the first reports from Srinagar.

When I got back to my office I saw that the morning papers carried bold headlines of how troops had been rushed by air to the rescue of Srinagar. They rightly brought out that troops had to be flown because that was the only means of transport left to them at such short notice. I, however, wondered whether the average reader would visualise how we struggled behind the scenes on that fateful night to make the dramatic despatch of these troops possible.

It would not be inappropriate to pause at this stage to consider some of the difficulties that initially faced us in Kashmir. Seldom was a campaign begun with troops so seriously handicapped and at such short notice. Apart from extremely difficult terrain, almost non-existent surface lines of communication and a complete lack of intelligence about the enemy, another major difficulty lay in the fact that the Army was in the process of being reorganised. British and Pakistani officers were being replaced by Indian officers. Several units had been split and had lost their old personnel who had to be sent to Pakistan. Large numbers of Indian Army personnel and units were still in Pakistan and had not yet been brought to India. Moreover,

during the last year or more, troops had been constantly employed on Internal Security duties entailing very wide dispersion and the sacrifice of their normal training. As if all this was not enough, there were also some very disturbing personal problems. Nearly 75 per cent of the officers and men came from Punjab, and a large number of them had lost their homes in Pakistan. Their families had been uprooted and in many cases they had even lost trace of them. The officers, except for the few senior ones, had in addition been suddenly brought down to greatly reduced rates of pay and allowances than what they had been getting during the British regime. Ironically, the first cut in our pay almost coincided with the commencement of these operations!* All these difficulties never deterred us for a moment from putting in our very best for accomplishing the task given to us. Notwithstanding the several drawbacks, the Army worked most loyally and with great enthusiasm. The gallant achievement of the Indian Army in spite of these handicaps was indeed an epic.

The enemy had planned the invasion of Kashmir in two phases. The first phase commenced in September 1947 when he carried out several border raids along the 500 miles Pakistan border. This was in the nature of a deception to force Jammu and Kashmir State Forces to dissipate their strength. In this he appears to have succeeded for when his second phase commenced, the State Forces were dispersed in several small garrisons all along the border. This phase started on 20th October 1947 when over 2000 raiders in motor lorries poured across the border from Pakistan. These raiders were a motley crowd comprising Hazara tribesmen, Afridis, Moslem League National Guards and Pakistan Army personnel said to be "on leave". They were equipped with the complete range of infantry weapons including machine-guns and heavy mortars. It was obvious that this large force had been assembled, equipped and launched into battle by Pakistan. It was a regular in-

*Decades later in 1970 I was given the task of projecting the case of the Army before the Pay Commission and we managed to secure substantial improvements in the emoluments of all ranks.

vasion of a peaceful neighbouring State without any of the formalities of declaring war. We had reliable reports about a British officer, recently transferred to Pakistan, having organised the necessary "base facilities" for the invading tribesmen. Only a few months earlier I had served under this officer and I had the highest regard for his professional ability and personal charm. One could not have asked for a better boss to serve under. He had also been intimately associated with Russell, having served on his staff during the last war. However, such situations were inevitable as only a few weeks earlier we had all belonged to the same undivided Indian Army.

The main enemy column advanced along the Domel Road heading for Srinagar, their supreme objective. Their advance was swift and was made easier by the desertion of some personnel of the State Forces guarding the Domel-Abbotabad road. An attempt was made to put up resistance at Garhi, 90 miles west of Srinagar, but in view of the enemy's overwhelming numerical superiority, any such attempt was doomed to failure. Garhi fell to the invaders on the 22nd of October. Thereafter the enemy developed a three-pronged attack on the communication centre of Uri from Muzaffrabad, Domel and Punch. Yet another attempt was made to stem this advance. Brigadier Rajindra Singh of the State Forces gathered a small force of only 150 men and held out at Uri. He was successful in delaying the enemy for two very precious days but in doing so, this small force was almost completely annihilated and its gallant commander killed. Having captured Uri, the enemy entered Mahura on the 24th, where he damaged the power house plunging the whole of Srinagar into darkness. Thereafter he advanced to Baramula, only 35 miles from Srinagar.

It was at this stage on 24 October 1947 that the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir sent an SOS message to Lord Mountbatten, the then Governor-General of India. The Maharaja wrote, "With the conditions obtaining at present in my State and the great emergency of the situation as it exists, I have no option but to ask for help from the Indian Dominion. Naturally they cannot send the help asked

for by me without my State acceding to the Dominion of India. I have accordingly decided to do so and I attach the Instrument of Accession for acceptance by your Government. The other alternative is to leave my State and my people to freebooters. On this basis no civilized Government can exist or be maintained. This alternative I will never allow to happen so long as I am the Ruler of the State and I have life to defend my country. I may also inform Your Excellency's Government that it is my intention at once to set up an Interim Government and ask Sheikh Abdullah to carry the responsibilities in this emergency with my Prime Minister. If my State has to be saved immediate assistance must be available at Srinagar. Mr. Menon is fully aware of the gravity of the situation and he will explain to you if further explanation is needed."

The Maharaja was indeed in a desperate plight and he very rightly decided to sink his differences with his erstwhile opponent, Sheikh Abdullah, in this hour of common peril. He knew that India's assistance could be obtained only if his request for assistance had the support of the people of his State. Hence his decision to ask Sheikh Abdullah to join the government, in spite of the fact that the Sheikh had hitherto always been opposing the Maharaja and his regime. Sheikh Abdullah readily accepted the invitation and joined in the appeal to India for support.

On the 26th, the Maharaja signed Instrument of Accession to the Indian Union. On the same day Government of India took the decision to send troops to the rescue of Kashmir, notwithstanding the several difficulties and handicaps inherent in this decision. The Prime Minister made it emphatically clear that India would give all possible assistance in driving out the raiders from the State but this aid would not have any strings attached to it. The people of the State would be at liberty to decide the question of accession to India or Pakistan. Of course there was no question of ascertaining their wishes till all the invaders had been driven out. This all-important point is now conveniently glossed over by Pakistan.

With Baramula in their hands and the opposition by the State Forces liquidated, the raiders had only 35 miles

of tarmac road to traverse to enter Srinagar unopposed, but the desire for plunder and pillage found greater favour with them than any tactical or humane considerations. Their obvious tactical objective at this stage was to secure Srinagar airfield and thereby prevent any aid coming from India by air. The fact that the Indian Army at that stage had neither sufficient number of trained parachutists nor the necessary equipment for an airborne operation, made it all the more imperative for them to have given high priority to the capture of the airfield. They also should have sent a small force to block Banihal Pass, the only feasible land route from India. With winter fast approaching this pass would, in any case, soon get blocked with snow. But instead of all this, they decided to plunge Baramula into an orgy of mass violence and brutality. In so doing, they lost two more precious days and this made the defence of Srinagar possible by the Indian Army.

The raiders ran amuck in Baramula. They burnt half the town, sacked houses and shops, abducted and raped women, and butchered men irrespective of race and religion. They shot Lieutenant Colonel Dykes, a former British officer of the Indian Army, and molested his wife, whose naked body was later found in a well. They sacked the Presentation Convent and murdered the Assistant Mother Superior, Sister Terassline as also some patients and a nurse in the nearby hospital. Their savagery was unbelieveable. Even the crosses covering the graves in the cemetery and the Holy images in the chapel were not spared their vandalism. Such were their methods of conducting a "holy war for the liberation of Muslims" in which the local Muslims suffered as much as non-Muslims, at the hands of their self-proclaimed liberators from Pakistan.

It was at this stage that Rai landed at Srinagar airfield on the morning of 27th October 1947. When he sent us his anxiously awaited first situation report over the civil aviation wireless net, we at the headquarters breathed a sigh of relief. We had won in the race against time and had beaten the enemy in the race for Srinagar. We, however, fully realised that we were still far from being out of the wood. The tactical situation with regard to the def-

ence of Srinagar was precarious. We had been able to send some 300 men only on the first day while the enemy opposing us was estimated to be approximately 5000 strong. The odds were loaded heavily against us. However, the possession of the airfield had given us the means of rapidly building up our strength in the Valley. And this we were determined to do, with all possible speed.

With the enemy still at Baramula, Rai's immediate problem was to decide whether to fight him at Baramula or wait for him at Srinagar, while in the meantime we rushed in more reinforcements. He rightly appreciated the need for bold and offensive action. Leaving one company behind for the protection of the airfield, he went forward to Baramula with two companies, one of which was the gunner battery in infantry role. He was able to advance to within a mile of Baramula when the first engagement with the enemy took place on the outskirts of the city. Both sides were surprised. The enemy did not expect the Indian Army to come up against him. Rai on the other hand discovered that the enemy was no ill-organised rabble nor was he like the tribesmen he had known on the North-West Frontier of the pre-partition days. These raiders were led by regular army officers conversant with tactics and they were equipped with modern weapons like machine-guns and mortars. In view of the enemy's overwhelming numerical superiority, Rai had to withdraw to a defensive position on the low hills astride the road, about two miles east of Baramula.

The following day the enemy commenced his advance to Srinagar and soon encountered Rai's troops holding the hill feature astride the road. The ensuing engagement lasted for the best part of the day. Our infantry looked expectantly for support to the gunner "company" with them, but these gunners were without their guns and could fire only rifles and light machine-guns! In view of the numerical odds, the result of this engagement was a foregone conclusion. The raiders tried to work their way round the flanks of our troops in an obvious attempt to encircle them. Rai at once realised the danger and ordered a withdrawal to Pattan, half-way between Baramula and Sri-

nagar. It was during this withdrawal that he was killed while pulling out with his rear party (last troops to abandon the position). His death was a great blow to us and in him we lost an officer of great promise. He had played a vital part in the defence of Srinagar during these two critical days. He had staggered the enemy, had delayed his advance and had given us time to rush reinforcements. It was gratifying to find that his gallant action was eloquently praised on the floor of the Parliament and his services suitably recognised by the posthumous award of Maha Vir Chakra.

In the meanwhile more troops were pouring into the Valley by air from Delhi. We were fully alive to the critical situation that faced us and we realised the vital need for sending maximum reinforcements by the fastest means. The entire resources of civil aviation were placed at our disposal to despatch troops by air but in those days the number of dakotas we had was limited and not more than 30 dakotas could be mustered for this purpose. Most of these dakotas did two sorties each and we were flying out 50 to 60 sorties a day from Delhi. A special word of praise is due to thte civilian pilotts who cooperated with us whole-heartedly working almost round the clock under difficult and hazardous conditions. Flying across the Pirpanjal Range to Srinagar and landing on the dusty fair weather airstrip there with no navigational aids, required skill and daring of a high order. These pilots showed that they possessed both these qualities in abundance.

In fairness to the officers and men who helped me in organising this airlift, I must mention that by 11th November when a RAMO* (Rear Airfield Maintenance Organisation) arrived in Delhi and relieved us, we had despatched over 600 aircraft sorties carrying over 5000 men and several thousand pounds of stores. At first we found the task of organising this airlift very uphill as issues of ammunition, rations and warm clothing as also detailing of

*A unit specially organised, trained and equipped for air despatch. It is now called RASO (Rear Airfield Supply Organisation).

aircraft loads had to be done almost simultaneously while the dakotas were warning their engines. But soon by trial and error we evolved a "bay system" of loading and things worked smoothly thereafter. I hope the initial lot of troops we despatched would forgive us for any inconvenience caused, as we were new to the trade and were then "experimenting". Neither we nor these civilian pilots had had any training or experience of organising troop movements by air and therefore such inconvenience was inevitable. However, inspite of these handicaps we soon achieved the peak of our efforts when we despatched over 60 sorties in one day.* I may also mention in passing that a couple of years later, a financial "pundit" discovered in audit that these aircraft had been used without proper financial approval. He brought out that detailed records of these flights as required by financial regulations had not been maintained. He desired that the bill which ran into several million rupees be sent to me by name and I be asked to give necessary explanation! I had a difficult and anxious time trying to "prove my innocence" and in getting the financial irregularity regularised.

We left the narrative of operations with 1 Sikh falling back to Pattan on the evening of 28th October. They dug their defences on a piece of high ground astride the main road and by the 29th the whole battalion was occupying a good defensive position. Headquarters 161 Infantry Brigade and some elements of another battalion (First Battalion, The Kumaon Regiment) as also a company of Mahar machine-gunners had also been flown in. More

*"Six hundred out of the 704 sorties were flown under the direct supervision of the officers of the then skeleton Delhi and East Punjab Command headquarters. For the first fortnight the daily routine for these officers began at 4 A.M. They arranged for the flight of the first wave upto 8 A.M. and then had to work in their offices upto late hours in the evening, with two or three hours break in between to lay on the flight of the second wave. At night they had again to go to the airfield and arrange issue of rations, clothing and ammunition and to detail aircraft loads for the flights of the following day."—*Defending Kashmir*, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

reinforcements were on their way both by land and by air. We had planned to send a complete brigade group with 180 days maintenance stocks for the whole writer before the snows isolated Srinagar both by air and by land from the rest of India. The enemy in the meanwhile was making bold plans for the capture of Srinagar. He had already nominated various civil officials to run his administration of the city. I believe his propaganda department had in anticipation even announced on his radio the victorious entry of his troops into Srinagar.

On the 29th, Brigadier* J. C. Katoch proceeded to Srinagar with his brigade headquarters to take over command of all troops in the valley. Unfortunately, he was wounded the following day by a sniper's bullet and he had to be evacuated back to Delhi. After a couple of days we heard that Colonel† L. P. Sen, DSO, then serving as Deputy Director, Military Intelligence, at Army Headquarters, had been selected to take over command of 161 Infantry Brigade in the Valley. Sen welcomed this assignment and he was confident of our ability to save the city. I remember him saying that he "would soon have the raiders swimming in the Jhelum". As later events showed, he certainly kept his promise and completely routed them, but what I felt was very important at that time was his air of self-confidence. Such confidence in a commander is always reassuring and it acts as a breath of fresh air in critical situations. I am sure this must have been a great morale raiser for the troops in the field.

After Katoch's evacuation, Russell decided to send a staff officer to Srinagar to get him a first hand account of the situation. I was detailed for this mission and I felt very happy at this opportunity of seeing things for myself. When I arrived at the brigade headquarters located on a small hillock near the airfield, there appeared to be a little confusion at the headquarters. In the past forty-eight hours no less than three different officers had commanded the brigade. And I had just brought news of the fourth

*Later Major General.
†Later Lieutenant General.

and the permanent one coming soon to take over command. After Katoch was wounded, the senior Lieutenant Colonel took over command, but as new battalions with more senior Colonels joined the brigade, the officiating brigade commander changed. With the arrival of Sen in Srinagar, the command situation of the brigade was "stabilised".

At Brigade Headquarters I was briefed about the latest situation in the Operations Room. The situation was very tense. Our troops were deployed on the airfield and on the western approaches to the city. The Sikhs were still holding out at Pattan and had beaten back two determined attacks supported by 3-inch mortars to dislodge them. In this, they were greatly assisted by the support given by our Air Force. Srinagar Airfield had been considered unsafe for Spitfires but this was soon proved wrong by two young pilots. They had come up to support the Sikhs at Pattan but they failed to spot any smoke signals with which the infantry was to indicate enemy positions. They boldly landed at Srinagar airfield for briefing and thereafter effectively strafed enemy's positions. Soon a flight of fighter aircraft was positioned at Srinagar to provide immediate support to the Army. The support given by these aircraft was of great help, particularly when we had not so far been able to send up any artillery to Srinagar. A section of mountain guns of Patiala Mountain Battery had been flown in but unfortunately these guns had arrived minus their sights!

As regards the enemy, our intelligence indicated that he was trying a three pronged advance on Srinagar. His main column was to advance along the Baramula-Srinagar road with two wide hooks on both flanks. The northern hook was to be via Gandarbal and the southern via Badgom. 1 Sikh had been effectively blocking the main enemy axis of advance at Pattan and we were now despatching troops to block the other two axes via Gandarbal and Badgom.

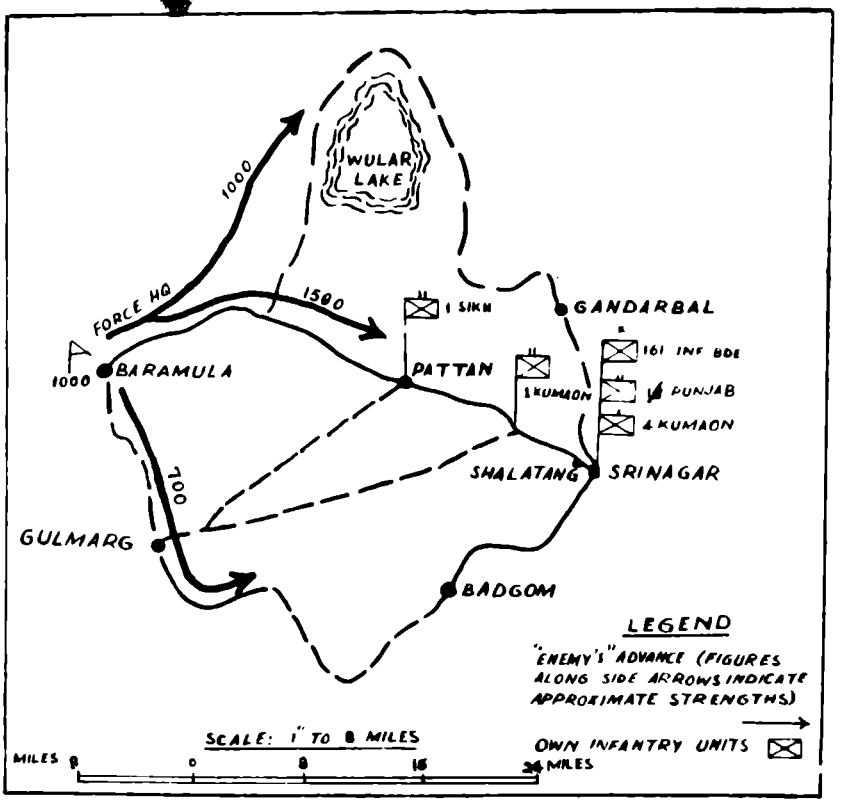
I briefed the brigade staff about the units we were planning to send into Kashmir. It was by no means a formidable list but it nevertheless acted as a tonic. It included three more infantry battalions, a squadron of armoured cars and a troop of 25-pounder guns. The armour and ar-

tillery reinforcements were to be brought up by road via Jammu. Within a week our Srinagar garrison would consist of five infantry battalions. A divisional headquarters was to be raised and initially located at Srinagar. This division was to be known as JAK Division and was to be in command of all troops in Jammu and Kashmir. This included 161 Infantry Brigade in the Valley and 50 Para Brigade at Jammu. Our position would undoubtedly become secure when all these units had been concentrated in Srinagar but the immediate problem was to keep the enemy at bay till this concentration was complete.

After our discussions at Brigade Headquarters, the Brigade Major very kindly gave me a vehicle to go round to see some of our positions. This enabled me to talk to various junior commanders and see the troops as also to get their reactions to the situation. It was indeed inspiring to see grim determination writ large on their faces. They were all determined to do their best, no matter what handicap they had to contend with. I had never before seen such enthusiasm and fervour for duty. Everyone was fully conscious of the fact that this was free India's first operation being fought entirely by Indian troops led in the field by their Indian commanders. They knew that the eyes of the Nation were focussed on them and that they must shoulder their grave responsibility, both cheerfully and successfully.

I returned to the airfield late in the afternoon to catch my plane back to Delhi. I met an old friend, Major Som Nath Sharma of 4 Kumaon, at the airfield. Only a day earlier I had despatched him with his company by air from Delhi. Som had his left hand in plaster and am afraid was rather disgusted with life when I met him. His complaint was that because of his "wretched" hand being in plaster, no one would give him an active assignment. His company was deployed for the local protection of the airfield and had also to provide working parties to unload aircraft. He was looking forward to the rest of his battalion coming up when he hoped he would be taken away from his present commitments and given something really active. I tried to impress upon Som the vital importance

OWN AND ENEMY DISPOSITIONS AT SRINAGAR
31 OCTOBER 1947



of the airfield to us and in that context the importance of the task assigned to him. I am afraid this "sermonising" could do little to fulfil his desire for being sent further forward. Anyway I spent an hour or so with Som waiting for my plane. Together we sat on the ground reclining against his kitbag and drinking a mug of tea. Little did I then know that within the next forty-eight hours, he was to die a hero's death and earn great renown, fighting most gallantly in very close proximity to where we then lay talking so leisurely. He was the first recipient of the supreme award for gallantry, Param Vir Chakra, our new equivalent for the Victoria Cross.

I caught my plane late that evening and we took off almost in darkness with no lights to aid us. The take-off, I am afraid, was not too smooth as the airstrip was only a fair weather landing ground and due to the recent heavy traffic, its dusty surface had deteriorated considerably. However, we were soon airborne, leaving a cloud of dust rising behind us in the evening twilight. Although I felt relieved at the safe take-off, I felt wretched at leaving my friends to an uncertain fate and to difficult living, whilst I was on my way to sleep in a comfortable bed in Delhi. I, however, returned to Delhi with complete confidence in the ability of our troops carrying out the difficult task given to them.

The threat to Srinagar airfield materialised when the enemy thrust reached Badgom only a few miles from the airfield. Som's desire for being given an active role was fulfilled for he was despatched with his company to deal with the enemy at Badgom. He ran into an enemy force approximately 700 strong, just north of Badgom at about 2 p.m. on the 3rd November. The enemy attacked him supported by both 3-inch and 2-inch mortars. He hurriedly occupied a defensive position with his company and sent a request for reinforcement. Despite being outnumbered by 7 to 1, he realised that the enemy must not be allowed to advance any further for that may mean the loss of the airfield which was the life-line of our troops in the Valley. He encouraged his men by his personal example with utter disregard to his own safety. His two for-

ward platoons were overrun by the enemy but he still held on with his third platoon. The last message received from Som at the headquarters over the wireless was:

> THE ENEMY IS ONLY 50 YARDS FROM US. WE ARE HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED. I WILL NOT WITHDRAW ONE INCH BUT FIGHT TO THE LAST MAN LAST ROUND.

Soon after, an enemy mortar bomb landed near Som and killed him. The reinforcement of one company of another Kumaon battalion arrived at Badgom by 5 p.m. but it was too late. By then our position had been overrun. Som's company had suffered over 50 per cent casualties but had inflicted much heavier casualties on the enemy who was estimated to have lost nearly 200 men. With the arrival of reinforcements at Badgom, the enemy appeared to lose his appetite for fighting. He called off his efforts to advance to the airfield. The immediate threat to the airfield was thus removed and the credit for this achievement went to Som and his gallant band of 100 brave Kumaonis. They were also assisted by the valuable support given to them by the Air Force. This accounted for a large number of enemy's casualties.

In view of the enemy's attempt at an outflanking movement towards Srinagar via Gandarbal and Badgom, Sen who had now taken over command of the Brigade, decided to pull in the Sikhs from Pattan, and form a closer defence ring round Srinagar. The Sikhs were withdrawn to a point on the main road, approximately 4 miles west of the city. The Kumaonis barred the route in the south via Badgom and the Punjabis (First Battalion The Second Punjab Regiment) were deployed to cover the northern route via Gandarbal. The withdrawal of the Sikhs from Pattan coincided with the Badgom engagement and perhaps gave an impression to the raiders that the Indian Army was retreating. They concentrated their effort on the central axis along the main road for a victorious march into Srinagar. As later events showed, this "victorious march" turned out to be their great rout and their hopes of capturing Srinagar were shattered for ever.

More troops continued to pour into Srinagar by air. Re-

inforcements by the land route via Jammu also started arriving. On 5th November, Major General* Kalwant Singh arrived in Srinagar and took over command of all our forces in Jammu and Kashmir. By the 6th we had completed the concentration of our forces at Srinagar and our order of battle in the Valley was as follows:

Tactical Headquarters JAK Division
Headquarters 161 Infantry Brigade
One squadron 7 Cavalry (armoured cars)
One section Patiala Mountain Battery
One troop 11 Field Regiment
1/2 Punjab Regiment
6 Rajputana Rifles
1 Sikh Regiment (plus one battery 13 Field Regiment in infantry role)
1 Kumaon Regiment
4 Kumaon Regiment

Sen was anxious to start his offensive soon as the raiders were then on open ground near Srinagar where they could not practise mountain warfare in which they were adept. He rightly appreciated that if the enemy was given a hard knock at Shalatang, four miles west of Srinagar where he had now concentrated his main strength, there would be nothing to prevent us from exploiting this success and recapturing Baramula. He had three infantry battalions plus all the available supporting arms for this task. The remaining two battalions, 6 Rajputana Rifles and 4 Kumaon, were formed into Srinagar Defence Force under the command of Colonel† Harbakhsh Singh and were made responsible for the protection of the airfield and the city.

And thus on the 7th November, we started our offensive against the enemy. Sen despatched a force of armoured cars and some infantry on a wide right hook north of Anchar Lake via Gandarbal to take the enemy at Shalatang from the rear while he attacked the enemy positions along

*Later Lieutenant General.

†Later Lieutenant General.

the road from the east. This was a brilliant manoeuvre and it succeeded admirably. The enemy was taken completely by surprise. At first the raiders thought that the armoured cars coming behind them were Pakistan Army fighting vehicles come to support them for their final push into Srinagar! They even cheered those armoured cars as they approached them but they were soon disillusioned when the guns on these armoured cars opened up against them. The Air Force provided continuous air support during this battle and took a heavy toll of the enemy. By the afternoon, the issue was firmly decided in our favour and the enemy fled in complete disorder. He left behind over 300 dead on the battlefield. Several more killed and wounded, he took away with him. It was a decisive victory for us and it marked the end of the critical ten days of operations. The threat to Srinagar had been removed once and for all. Sen had certainly kept his promise of sending the raiders swimming in the Jhelum!

Immediately after the Shalatang battle, our troops took up the pursuit of the retreating enemy. We advanced to Pattan, 17 miles from Srinagar the same day and were in Baramula the following afternoon. The enemy had been completely shaken and demoralised after the hard knock at Shalatang. He made no effort to put up any determined resistance except for certain small parties which were easily brushed aside by our troops. I remember we were at Pathankot in our special train when the news of the recapture of Baramula reached us. I immediately took the information to the Army Commander who was then busy examining plans for developing Pathankot into an administrative base. He was very pleased with the success and he sent a personal message to Kalwant Singh,

> Congratulations for Baramula. Your success will have far reaching results. Well done.

He also asked me to send another message to Mellsop, the Brigadier General Staff, who was at the main headquarters at Delhi. This was regarding future operations in the Valley. He wanted Mellsop to obtain a ruling from

Army Headquarters. He was of the opinion that we must fully exploit our success while the enemy was on the run and at the same time avoid getting involved in a possible open conflict with Pakistan's regular forces. He recommended that we should continue our advance to Muzaffrabad on the Pakistan/Kashmir border and demolish the two bridges on the border over the Kishanganga at Domel and Kohala. Our troops should withdraw immediately thereafter, leaving the Kashmir Police to take over border policing duties at Domel and Kohala. The brigade group in the Valley would be available as a mobile reserve to deal with any further incursions by the raiders which in the circumstances appeared unlikely, at any rate in the immediate future. This plan of course presumed that Pakistan would avoid an open conflict and her regular army would not openly invade the State.

In the meanwhile, Sen continued his advance after the capture of Baramula. Beyond Baramula the road goes through a gorge running parallel to the Jhelum river and is flanked by high hills varying in height from 8,000 to 10,000 feet. We realised that an advance through such difficult country would inevitably be slow but our columns made good progress despite the enemy destroying bridges on the road. Within four days of liberating Baramula we had liberated Uri which was entered by our leading troops on 13th November. The power house at Mahura was restored and the curtain of darkness over Srinagar was lifted. Electric lights once again lit the fair city, symbolising the return of security.

Russell's recommendation for an immediate advance to Muzaffrabad had not been accepted for we now received orders to send a relief column to Punch where a State Force garrison was besieged. There were some 40,000 non-Muslim refugees trapped in Punch and their security was in jeopardy. Punch is approximately 20 miles south of Uri and it was obvious that with the decision to despatch a relief column to Punch, our westerly advance would have to be halted, at any rate for the time being. I have reasons to believe that the decision to go to the relief of Punch was taken at the highest Government level at Delhi,

prompted by primarily humanitarian considerations to succour the besieged refugees. Our leaders perhaps allowed themselves to be over influenced by the alarming reports fed to them by the State Force garrison and the State Government. It was of course not the first time in history when political considerations outweighed military requirements. From the humanitarian point of view the decision to proceed to Punch may have been commendable but militarily it was not a wise move. There was no gainsaying that the advance to Muzaffrabad would not have been an easy undertaking. The difficult terrain was ideally suited for the delaying tactics of the tribesmen. The enemy had destroyed several bridges which in many cases would have had to be repaired before the advance could be resumed, as diversions on these steep hill sides were often not possible. Moreover, our troops had been sent by air and their transport had not yet caught up with them. Lack of transport was indeed a great handicap and we had hitherto tried to do our best with locally requisitioned civilian buses and cars. There was also the risk of our stretching our necks too far forward across a difficult line of communication which the enemy could cut from the south. Yet with all these attendant difficulties, I felt that an advance to Muzaffrabad, when the enemy was off balance, would have been a calculated risk, well worth taking. It would have perhaps drawn the final curtain over operations in the Valley as Pakistan may not at that time have ventured to launch a fresh incursion with her regular forces across the border, particularly when she had been denying her complicity in this invasion. In the event, the fact that the enemy still held so-called Azad territory from Muzaffrabad to Uri, not only gave him scope for getting reinforcements and developing his operations but also gave him useful propaganda material with which to boost the morale of his shaken tribesmen, namely his alleged claim to have halted our advance at Uri. Another fact which must not be overlooked while considering this issue, was that our advance beyond Uri would have forced the enemy to ease his pressure on the besieged garrison of Punch. The actual relief of Punch could well have been

carried out after we had sealed the border by demolishing bridges and establishing our posts at Domel and Kohala. Our quick return from Muzaffrabad after accomplishing this task would not only have avoided an open clash with Pakistan's regular army but would have also ensured that we were not landed with a long line of communication commitment in that difficult country. One may draw an analogy with the German advance of April 1941 beyond El Agheila in North Africa. General Streich commanding the German 5th Light Division had misgivings about the terrain and the state of his vehicles when he was ordered to pursue the retreating British Forces. Rommel over-ruled his objections. He wrote, "One cannot permit unique opportunities to slip by for the sake of trifles." Perhaps our decision not to continue the advance to Muzaffrabad was a case of our permitting a unique opportunity to slip by. I do, however, concede that while examining this question in retrospect one can be wise after the event. Anyway, we had now made the Valley secure, given the enemy a hard knock, assumed the offensive after having fought with our backs to the wall at the gates of Srinagar and had advanced 60 miles to Uri. The dramatic decision to rescue Srinagar had been successfully implemented and thus ended the initial phase of operations in the Valley, with the balance sheet drawn heavily in our favour.

3

The First Winter

IN THE early days of these operations, our attention was primarily focussed on the defence of Srinagar and on the fighting in the Valley. There were, besides, two other sectors of the State which had also been invaded but we had given them low priority. The reason for this was obvious. The situation at Srinagar had been critical. Being the capital of the State, the city offered a great political prize to the enemy. Once the situation at Srinagar had been saved and we had moved more troops into the State, we could turn our attention to the other two sectors. These two sectors were, the remote areas of Gilgit Agency in the North and nearer the Punjab plains, the Jammu province.

The enemy tried different tactics in his campaign in Gilgit Agency. He cleverly subverted the loyalty of a section of the Maharaja's forces. The whole plot for an uprising had been laid at Peshawar in Pakistan. These disloyal elements of Kashmir State Forces initially demanded higher rates of pay and better conditions of service. And when the raiders started their advance towards Srinagar, about 100 of them mutinied. They surrounded the residence of the Governor, Brigadier Ghansara Singh and demanded his surrender within fifteen minutes. The Governor was given the ultimatum to surrender within that stipulated time or else all non-Muslims in Gilgit would be killed. He had no option but to accept these terms. The rebels assumed charge of the Government. Certain British

and local officers of the Gilgit Scouts (a frontier militia unit) provided the leadership for this coup. Notable amongst them was Major Brown, the Commandant of the Scouts. The non-Muslim elements of the Frontier Scouts and 6 Jammu and Kashmir Infantry were largely liquidated. A few survivors, however, escaped and took refuge with another garrison of State troops at Skardu under Colonel Thapa of the State Forces. Pakistan administration was soon set up in Gilgit and the whole of this area except the besieged Skardu Fort passed into enemy hands. With Gilgit in his hands and a regular air service from Peshawar to Gilgit, the enemy could now threaten Ladakh which lies to the South-East.

Gilgit is approximately 150 miles north of Srinagar across high mountain ranges. The majestic Nanga Parbat (26,000 feet high) crowns one of the ranges on the route to Gilgit. Other than foot-paths and mule tracks, there were no roads leading to this barren, sparsely populated and highly mountainous area. These foot-paths and mule tracks go over high Himalayan mountain passes varying from 11,000 to 13,000 feet in height, and these are blocked with snow for over six months in the year. Even the air route to this area is hazardous. Aircraft have to fly at heights over 20,000 feet in difficult atmospheric conditions and need pressurised cabins. In 1947 we had very few such aircraft. It was, therefore, evident that there was little we could do during the winter months on this arctic front.

The story in Jammu province was very different. Here the invasion had followed the pattern of the enemy's incursion in the Kashmir Vale. The raiders had poured across the border from Pakistan with "shoot, burn, kidnap and destroy" as their war cry. Helpless women came in for their special attention and they abducted them in large numbers. In this sector the enemy had all the advantages of terrain. He could concentrate in his "sanctuaries" across the border in Pakistan which of course we could not interfere with. Even the flying of reconnaissance sorties over his concentration areas was not permissible as that would have meant the violation of the air space of a "sister dominion". The area between Pathankot and Jhangar,

a distance of 140 miles, offered the raiders a very broad front for their depredations, with all their objectives within a radius of 15 to 20 miles from their sanctuaries. On our side, the fair weather road from Pathankot to Jhangar, running parallel to the border and vulnerable throughout its length, provided the only means of communication in this area. This unmetalled road went over several fords and ferries across large rivers. It would go out of commission for days together when it rained and these parts have a fair amount of winter rains. The first 70 miles of this road from Pathankot to Jammu was the life-line for all our troops in this theatre. It is a wonder why the enemy confined his activities between Pathankot and Jammu to merely cattle-lifting and women-abducting raids. Perhaps he was too preoccupied with the "pleasures" of pillage and plunder to worry about the "cold comfort" of gaining any tactical advantages. Later, perhaps when the tactical sense dawned on him, it was too late as we had by then strengthened this sector and Pakistan was possibly not too keen to launch an open invasion from her territory when the case was under reference to the United Nations. It would be recalled that as mentioned earlier, Pakistan had at that stage denied any complicity with this invasion.

In early November 1947, I had gone to Jammu to bring back certain information for the Army Commander. I found this city of temples unusually calm and quiet. Unlike Srinagar there was not much tenseness nor that sense of urgency. Things appeared to move leisurely and the people went about their normal work without much excitement. It is true that they were all deeply interested in the happenings in Srinagar and the western areas of the province but they felt there was no immediate threat to Jammu itself. Although Jammu is only 15 miles from the Pakistan border, this fact did not disturb their complacency. After all Pakistan had not declared an open war against us. There were, of course, gruesome stories of raids across the border but in 1947, such "savagery" was not an uncommon occurrence. Anyway, they felt that with the Indian Army now come to their rescue, peaceful conditions would soon be restored.

We had moved 50 Para Brigade by road to Jammu and this brigade was concentrated in the town. One of its battalions, First Battalion, The Second Punjab Regiment, and some armoured cars had been rushed up north to Srinagar.

Sri Ram, the brigade major, met me that morning and we spent a very useful morning exchanging notes on various matters of immediate concern to us at that time. He explained the situation to me on a large map. The raiders had seized considerable territory adjacent to the Pakistan border in the western areas of Jammu province. Our aircraft had during reconnaissance sorties spotted several fires burning in Mirpur, Punch, Naushera and Riasi districts. The State Forces had been surrounded in Mirpur, Kotli, Punch, Jhangar, Naushera, Bhimber, Rajauri and Beripattan. Large numbers of non-Muslim refugees had taken shelter with these besieged garrisons. The eastern portion of this sector between Pathankot and Jammu as already mentioned had only been subjected to the "loot and flee" raids. It was evident that we could not undertake any relief operations in the western parts without first making arrangements for the protection of the vital line of communication between Pathankot and Jammu.

After obtaining further detailed information about the strength of the besieged State Force garrisons and of the enemy surrounding them, I settled down to a quiet lunch on a canal bank with Sri Ram. A lovely garden stretched in front of us and the flowers were in bloom. Everything appeared so quiet and peaceful. While in such surroundings one could hardly believe that war clouds had burst over the State and that its people were engaged in a grim life and death struggle.

After the successful rout of the raiders at Srinagar and the pursuit to Uri, we now had to plan operations for the relief of the several isolated and besieged State Force garrisons. With winter fast approaching which would rule out the possibility of any large-scale operations in the Valley, the centre of gravity naturally shifted south to Jammu. On the 15th of November, Kalwant Singh moved with his divisional headquarters from Srinagar to

Jammu. In the meanwhile we moved up one additional brigade from India. 268 Infantry Brigade was moved to Jammu to take over the protection of the line of communication from Pathankot to Jammu, thereby freeing 50 Para Brigade for a western advance.

We made a bold plan for the relief of the besieged garrisons. 161 Infantry Brigade was to send a column south from Uri to Punch, while 50 Para Brigade from the south was to advance via Naushera, Jhangar and Kotli. The two columns were to meet a few miles south of Punch. This meant that the northern column under Sen had to advance 30 miles and the southern under Brigadier* Paranjpye 95 miles. These columns were being sent out on a mercy mission to bring out 2000 State Force personnel and 60,000 refugees who were then besieged by the enemy at different places in Jammu province and at Punch.

Paranjpye commenced his advance on the 13th of November. He reached Akhnur the same day, where one infantry battalion was positioned for the protection of his axis of advance. There was a dangerous salient of Pakistan territory pointing northwards near Akhnur which we had named, "dagger".† Akhnur is at the head of this dagger and is only 2 miles from the border. We had to keep some troops for the protection of the vital bridge over the Chenab at Akhnur. Two days later, the southern column reached Beripattan to find that the ferry had been damaged by the enemy. Although delayed on this account, the column consisting of one squadron armoured cars, one troop field guns and two infantry battalions (1/2 Punjab and 3 Rajput) continued its westward advance. This column was scheduled to relieve the Kotli garrison by the

*Later Major General.

† During the 1965 war Akhnur was the objective of Pakistan's Chhamb offensive. Due to our offensive in Punjab, Pakistan was forced to call off her attempt to capture Akhnur. By 1971 the "Dagger" had more appropriately been renamed "Chicken's Neck" by a dear friend of mine and one of our ablest field commanders, Lt Gen Z. C. Bakshi, PVSM, MVC, VrC., VSM. In a brilliant operation when he was commanding 26 Inf Div, he captured Chicken's Neck.

18th of November but it soon became obvious that it would not be possible for the column to keep to its time schedule. The enemy did not put up any serious opposition till after Jhangar had been crossed but the column's rate of advance was slowed by the difficult nature of the terrain. Beyond Jhangar the enemy put up 47 road blocks which in these mountain defiles, considerably delayed our advance. The destruction of the Ban bridge on the Jhangar-Kotli road by the enemy was another handicap to our speedy advance. However, at 2.30 p.m. on 26th November the column entered Kotli and forced the enemy to raise the siege. Although it had encountered no major enemy opposition *en route*, this column had advanced 92 miles over a difficult route, in a terrain ideally suited for delaying tactics. It had also in the process relieved Beripattan, Naushera, Jhangar and Kotli, evacuating several thousand refugees. Due to the stiffening of enemy opposition around Punch and the difficulties of fighting a battle at the end of such a long and difficult route, the plan to effect a link with the northern column was given up. Paranjpye was ordered to return to Jhangar and he commenced his return journey the following day with the relieved State Force garrisons and the refugees. The column was back in Jhangar on the 28th. It had been planned that after effecting the link-up, Paranjpye would withdraw to Jhangar and thence proceed south-west to relieve the Mirpur garrison. In the event, the relief of Mirpur could not be carried out as the enemy had captured the town by the time Paranjpye's column returned from Kotli to Jhangar. There were 600 State Force troops and some 12,000 refugees in Mirpur. The enemy attacked Mirpur on the night of 25/26th November with approximately two battalions supported by mountain artillery but the attack was not pressed home. Our aircraft flying over Mirpur on the 26th had observed gun flashes in Mirpur and engaged them. The besieged garrison had displayed a message to the pilot saying, "We are withdrawing." At that time Paranjpye was trying to relieve Kotli 30 miles to the north and it was not possible for him to rush to the rescue of Mirpur garrison. The garrison had therefore to fight its own way out, but strong patrols

from Jhangar advanced towards Mirpur to help this withdrawal. 400 State Force troops and 10,000 refugees were ultimately brought back safely into Jhangar.

The northern column known as Sen column after the name of its commander, started its advance from Uri on the morning of 20th November. This column consisted of two infantry battalions (2 Dogra and 1 Kumaon) and a mountain battery. It was divided into three groups, the two battalions forming No. 1 and 2 groups with all the transport and other administrative elements in No. 3 group. The latter had a company of Dogras for its protection. The column's objectives were the relief of Punch and thereafter link up with Paranjpye's column. After completing these tasks the column was to withdraw to Uri.

The Kashmir winter was now on us and I dare say the crossing of the 8000 feet wind-swept Hajipir Pass on the route to Punch must have been a "chilly affair". However, by late afternoon on the first day, the column had advanced 18 miles towards Punch, when orders were issued to occupy a night harbour. The advance was resumed the following morning. No. 1 group was across Hajipir Pass and the rear group containing all the 'soft' elements a few miles short of it. The enemy decided to attack at this stage. He attacked the base at Uri and the rear group of Sen column on the 21st morning. Uri had been left under the protection of 1 Sikh and they gallantly repulsed this attack. The enemy, however, succeeded in ambushing the rear group of Sen's column and burnt some twelve of our vehicles. This group held out against the enemy for the whole day but by evening it was obvious that it could not hold out for much longer. It was forced to withdraw into the firm base at Uri. In the meanwhile the other two groups of the column continued their advance southwards but another mishap thwarted Sen's plans. The besieged garrison at Punch had literally burnt its own boat when it sent a party up North and destroyed the bridge at Kahuta, eight miles north of Punch. When we heard of this, I remember our Chief Engineer at the Headquarters fuming with anger. He repeatedly pointed out that this was against all teaching for carrying out demolitions in war.

Demolitions must be carried out under the direction of the highest tactical commander. Faced with a demolished bridge at Kahuta and with the vehicle column ambushed in the rear, we had to alter our original plans for the advance to Punch and the link-up with the southern column. It was decided to withdraw Sen's column to the firm base at Uri but before doing so, one infantry battalion was sent to Punch. The Kumaonis under Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh* scrambled across the stream at Kahuta and reinforced beleaguered Punch. Although we did not then succeed in relieving Punch, we managed to reinforce the garrison which enabled it to hold out for one full year. On the same date in the following year we finally forced the enemy to lift the siege.

There was also, as we have already seen, a need for relief operations further North in the Gilgit sector where Skardu was besieged. Here the fight against the elements threatened to be very severe. Not deterred by the grave difficulties, Sen despatched a relief State Force column from Srinagar with two Indian Army Officers, Majors Sampuran Bachan Singh and Coutts. Another column under Major Prithi Chand with some volunteers was despatched to Leh, the capital of Ladakh which was also threatened. Leh is about a month's trek from Srinagar. The track to Leh went over Zoji La which was considered impassable in winter. Despite all the forbidding hardship, Prithi Chand and his gallant volunteers succeeded in their hazardous task during that bitter winter, and reached Leh. The column to Skardu, however, could not reach its destination. It was ambushed only a few miles short of Skardu and its porters deserted.

When the stumps were drawn at the end of the second round, our batting scores still remained high. Six besieged garrisons had been relieved/reinforced and security had been brought to 60,000 marooned refugees. As for the enemy's bowling analysis, he had some local gains to show but his record still remained unenviable. He had succeeded in ambushing Sen's vehicle group, and thwarted our plans

*Later Brigadier.

for relieving Mirpur and Skardu, but by no means had he succeeded in bringing all the "infidels" at Mirpur or Skardu under his sword. These relief operations may not have been as dramatic or spectacular as the defence of Srinagar, but they nevertheless brought us substantial gains. Apart from the humanitarian aspect of the success achieved, we had also advanced 70 miles forward from Jammu. Those who have seen the terrain in this area and have fought the ill-equipped tribesmen during the British regime in similar terrain on undivided India's North-West Frontier, would readily appreciate these achievements against well armed tribesmen, aided and abetted by Pakistan.

After the successful completion of our relief operations, the general tactical position in this theatre was as follows. We were holding the territory up to Jhangar in Jammu province. The area both north and south of line Akhnur-Jhangar was, however, held by the enemy. Further north, Punch, though held by us, continued to be besieged. Our garrison in this town was isolated. We had no land link with Punch. In the Kashmir Vale, the area up to Uri was firmly in our hands. We had also sent a small contingent of troops to Leh. And in the remote north, Skardu was still holding out, but almost the whole of Gilgit Agency had fallen to the enemy.

Russell was not too happy with the situation in Punch. There were some 2000 serving soldiers from Punch in the Pakistan Army who could be classified as "potential deserters" to fight against us in the battle for Punch. We had already received ample evidence to prove that large numbers of these so-called deserters with arms had joined the enemy and were fighting against us. There were also reports of tribal "lashkars" motoring up to the Punch border and thence infiltrating in large numbers via the several hill tracks. Russell wrote about operations in Punch, "It is really in the tribesmen's best interest to use their normal tribal, that is, dispersal tactics. In the Kashmir Valley, they tried to fight too like regular troops. They gave us a good target, a solid objective and were completely thwarted. In future, they will eschew open country. But the tribesman, as you well know, is a far

more dangerous man, and far more difficult to deal with, when he is playing his own guerilla game in the hills and this is the game I see him playing in Punch, in strength and continuously. Should he do this, we would be landed with a permanent frontier commitment, which I might describe as a running sore, requiring us to lock up a large and possibly increasing number of troops, from which we will get very few tangible results. I cannot therefore overestimate the importance of our avoiding being seriously, much less permanently committed in Punch, at present."

From the military point of view, Russell had admirably analysed the pros and cons of holding on to Punch. His analysis was of course based on his personal experience of fighting the tribesmen for several years in similar terrain on undivided India's North-West Frontier. A pull out from Punch would have enabled him to concentrate his resources in Uri and to regain the initiative for developing further operations, even possibly an advance to Domel.

It has, however, often happened in war that political considerations are at variance with the military appraisal of a situation. It happened so with the British venture in Greece during the early years of the last war. In a democracy when such a situation arises, invariably the political considerations prevail. But it is the soldier's duty to put up to his Government the military implications of a problem. Once the Government has given its ruling, then the soldier must implement that decision, implicitly and loyally. And that is exactly what Russell did with regard to operations in Punch both before the despatch of Sen column to Punch and also subsequently when the question of holding on to Punch was being examined. He put up his military appreciation at a very high level conference but after due deliberation, he was told that Punch must be held at all costs. He then asked, "I take it, Sir, that you consider that the importance of the retention of Punch justifies all the risks." The reply was in the affirmative. Thereupon Russell cheerfully spoke, "Very well, Sir, you may rest assured that General

Kalwant Singh and I will do our utmost to make a success of this operation, though we shall want a bit of good luck on our side." In the event, fortune did favour us with that "bit of good luck" and thanks to the magnificent fight put up by our troops and to the stoicism of the civilians, besieged. Punch was successfully defended for one full year against heavy odds. But this imposed a considerable drain on our slender resources which could perhaps be utilised more profitably elsewhere.

At the headquarters we now started examining plans for three possible thrusts with a view to both relieving Punch garrison and securing the maximum possible areas of the State with the limited resources then available to us. The northern thrust from Uri could be aimed against Domel but here the climatic conditions were not very favourable for our undertaking any major offensive operation during the winter months. Moreover, the enemy had now recovered from his shock at Shalatang and had brought in about 10,000 armed men between Uri and Domel. So far as we were concerned, we could not possibly maintain more than 4000 troops in the Valley during the winter because of logistic difficulties. The 300 miles long land route from Pathankot to Srinagar was blocked by snow at Banihal Pass. The fairweather airstrip was also not usable for most part of the winter. This imposed a serious limitation on the strength of troops that could be maintained in the Valley. In view of these difficulties, a ceiling of 4000 troops had been fixed for the Valley that winter. This ruled out the possibility of an advance towards Domel or even another relief column to Punch via Hajipir Pass. Enemy opposition around Punch had stiffened. Punch would have to be relieved from the south. A thrust along Naushera-Kotli-Punch could accomplish this task. It was appreciated that we required a minimum of two brigade groups forward of Beripattan to undertake this operation as one complete brigade group would be required for the Punch link-up while another brigade group based at Naushera protected the line of communication which was so vulnerable. The third thrust, which Russell called the southern thrust, could have Bhimber on the Jammu/Pakis-

tan border as its objective. An advance to Bhimber would secure the Southern flank of the Central thrust.

Russell had appreciated that the minimum force required to conduct operations in this theatre was four brigade groups with a total of sixteen infantry battalions, but Kalwant Singh had only three brigades with eleven battalions and was woefully understrength in supporting arms, particularly artillery. It was, therefore, necessary that we built up our strength in this theatre before we launched any further offensive operations. Logistics had to be carefully geared to support additional troops. The improvement of roads was of prime importance to meet the logistic requirements for a large force. It may be recalled that there was then no bridge at Beripattan (only a ferry existed which had the maximum capacity of crossing about fifty vehicles a day), and the present Pathankot-Jammu road had not been constructed. The turn round of vehicles from Pathankot to Jammu used to be three days at that time, as, apart from the very dusty and uneven road surface, vehicles also had to ford three large rivers, Ravi, Ujh and Basantar, which had no bridges over them.

The next phase of our operations, therefore, became primarily defensive, aimed at consolidating our substantial gains. However, despite his inadequate resources, Kalwant Singh did not miss any opportunity of being aggressive. On the 10th of December he sent 1 Patiala Infantry forward along the axis for the southern thrust and occupied Chhamb. Local gains had also been achieved in several clashes and our patrols had given a good account of themselves in numerous encounters. In one case, one of our strong patrols near Uri comprising young men between 18 and 19, who had recently passed out from a Boys Company at their Training Centre, launched a surprise attack on an enemy held feature and captured it. Later, the enemy counter-attacked, supported by automatic and mortar fire but the counter-attack was repulsed. At the end of the engagement, 92 enemy dead were counted, 20 of whom wore badges of the Frontier Force Regiment of the Pakistan Regular Army.

The enemy also intensified his activities during this

period and increasing evidence was now pouring in of the direct participation of Pakistan regular army in these battles. The brigade at Uri beat back several determined enemy attempts to dislodge them. Sometimes we could do so only at the end of savage hand-to-hand fighting. On one night 1 Sikh at Uri had three bayonet encounters with the enemy and beat them back every time. It was during one of these encounters that Jamadar Nand Singh was killed. He had won the Victoria Cross in the last war and for his gallant action that night, he was posthumously awarded the Vir Chakra. On another occasion in January, an enemy party of 1500 moved along the northern bank of Jhelum and concentrated opposite Mahura with a view to raiding the power house and disrupting it. Our troops threw a steel cable across the 100 yards gorge through which flows the rapid Jhelum and got across under cover of darkness. They then fell upon the raiders at midnight and took them completely by surprise. The raiders fled in utter disarray and amongst the dead that night was their battalion commander. There were several similar instances during the winter months when Sen successfully repulsed repeated enemy attempts to capture or by pass Uri. The success achieved by him during these winter months may not have been as spectacular as at Shalatang and the subsequent advance to Uri, but it was no less substantial. It goes to the credit of this brigade that, isolated from the rest of the Army, it successfully held out against much superior numbers and in most trying winter conditions when it had no winter warfare equipment. In doing so, this brigade not only held its ground against repeated attacks but also gave the enemy several severe knocks.

The enemy was able to register a notable success in the South in late December, when he captured Jhangar on the 27th. His plans for the capture of Jhangar were ingenious and he succeeded in achieving surprise. Jhangar was strategically important to him as it lay on his route from Mirpur to Kotli and also on his route to Palandri. The latter was the capital of the so-called Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir) government set up by him. Jhangar was at that time weakly held by us. Being near the border, the

enemy could quickly concentrate his resources against it during the night, without being interfered with by our Air Force. The enemy cleverly chose the 24th of December as the D-day for launching his attack on Jhangar because bad weather at that time had grounded our aircraft at the fair weather strip at Jammu. Our troops at Jhangar could not therefore be given any air support. There were two companies, that is, approximately 200 men defending Jhangar at that time. The enemy had created a diversion on the route between Beripattan and Naushera by carrying out a successful raid against one of our convoys on the 19th of December. He destroyed fifteen of our vehicles in this raid. Before launching his attack on the Jhangar garrison, he first cut off the road between Naushera and Jhangar. This was a game he could easily play as our long lines of communication running parallel to the border presented him with a very broad front on which he could select his objectives at leisure. On the night of 23rd/24th, large parties succeeded in infiltrating into our outer perimeter at Jhangar in Mala and Khambah fort area. Having concentrated some 6000 men during the night, the enemy launched an attack at dawn from both the south and the west. A grim battle ensued in which a platoon of our Mahar machine-gunners particularly distinguished themselves. They died on their guns fighting to the last man but only after they had taken a heavy toll of the attackers with their deadly fire. Our hopelessly outnumbered garrison was forced to withdraw and by mid-day the enemy had succeeded in capturing Jhangar.

A relief column was despatched by Brigadier Usman, Commander 50 Para Brigade, when he learnt of the enemy attack developing against Jhangar. This column consisting of one battalion, some armoured cars and a detachment of machine-guns set out from Naushera on the morning of the 24th. We hoped that it would arrive in time at Jhangar, only 12 miles away, to turn the scales of the battle in our favour. We were soon disillusioned, for hardly 5 miles out of Naushera this column encountered some 3000 of the enemy entrenched on hills on either side of the road, blocking its route of advance. Despite all efforts this column

could not break through this road-block and after mid-day when elements of the Jhangar garrison started withdrawing, it became clear that we were fighting a losing battle. The column was, therefore, given orders to disengage itself and withdraw to our base at Naushera. The enemy followed this withdrawal and flushed with victory launched an attack against Naushera on the following day. He made several attempts to rush our picquets but our troops stood firm and beat back all these attempts with heavy losses to the enemy.

We were a little upset about the loss of Jhangar but I remember Russell had remained completely unruffled. He rightly said that in war as in any game, one cannot always have everything one's own way and one must at times accept one's adversary being successful but this should only help one in one's determination to trounce the other side more thoroughly at a suitable opportunity. The suitable opportunity did arrive a little later and the loss of Jhangar was amply avenged. Usman considered the withdrawal from Jhangar a great personal affront. I understand that he took an oath not to sleep on a cot until he had retaken Jhangar, and he strictly adhered to this vow.

About this time when the situation in Jhangar was critical, I was rung up by a Deputy Secretary from the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, late one night. He wanted us to evacuate some non-Muslim refugees from Alibeg (near Mirpur) through Jhangar on the following day. His counterpart in Pakistan had promised to help and had agreed that he should decide about the route of evacuation. I tried to explain to him that it was impossible to evacuate the refugees through Jhangar. Apart from the short notice, the situation in that area was critical and a fierce battle was raging there. I suggested that the evacuation of these refugees should be arranged through West Punjab under the aegis of the Military Evacuation Organisation at Lahore. But all my reasoning could not convince him and he failed to appreciate why a circuitous route be followed via Lahore or Sialkot to Jammu, when Alibeg was only a few miles from Jhangar. He remained unconvinced and our telephone conversation ended abruptly

with him threatening me with dire consequences for my stubbornness! My eyes fell on a poster on the wall, which I had brought with me from Army Headquarters where at the instance of Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, it had been issued to all his staff officers. This poster had an extract of a letter written by the Duke of Wellington in 1810 to Lord Bradford, the then Secretary of State for War. It read :

My Lord,

If I attempt to answer the mass of futile correspondence that surrounds me, I should be debarred from all serious business of campaigning.

I must remind your Lordship — for the last time — that so long as I retain an independent position, I shall see that no officer under my command is debarred by attending to the futile drivelling of mere quill driving in your Lordship's office — from attending to his first duty — which is, and always has been so to train and lead the private men under his command that they may, without question, beat any force opposed to them in the field.

I am, My Lord
Your Obedient Servant,
Wellington

What the Duke had written nearly 150 years ago was equally applicable, even now. Taking my clue from him, I did not bother myself with the Alibeg evacuation problem and I managed to survive the Deputy Secretary's wrath. Later I learnt that these refugees were evacuated by the circuitous route via Lahore which was, in the circumstances, the only feasible course.

For political reasons it had been decided that no British officers of the Indian Army should go to Jammu and Kashmir. Because of this ban, the Army Commander and all his senior staff officers were placed in a peculiar position of not being able to visit the forward areas. Russell could direct operations only from his Headquarters at Delhi which was several hundred miles behind the front line.

With his active war record during the two world wars and also during the intervening years on the old North-West Frontier, Russell could hardly be expected to be happy with such restriction. He represented that the curtain drawn between him and his troops in the field, was fair neither to him nor to his officers and men. Therefore he suggested that either an Indian officer should be appointed to replace him or the restriction on his visiting the forward areas should be removed. Government chose the first alternative. Lieutenant General K. M. Cariappa,* who had only a month earlier gone as Army Commander in the East, was now posted as our new Army Commander.

Russell had started our headquarters from scratch and led us successfully through some very critical days. His reassuring smile and his extremely considerate attitude had been a source of inspiration to all of us. He had given the best years of his life to the Indian Army and he was to us, the typical example of the General who would always and every time place the welfare and comfort of his officers and men before his own. The changed political conditions had not in any way altered his enthusiasm for the Service. He completely identified himself with us and he always talked in terms of "our officers, our men and our army". With his personal example, he had built wonderful *esprit de corps* in his headquarters and we all felt sad when he was leaving us. In the short time that he had been our Army Commander both he and his wife, Lady Russell, had endeared themselves to all the members of his staff by their kindness and generous hospitality. Later, when we read of his being made a Knight of the Order of the British Empire, we all felt a sense of personal pride over the well deserved recognition of the merit of our erstwhile chief.

At his last "morning prayers"† which as always was presided over by his BGS (Brigadier General Staff), Russell

*Later General and first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army.

† The morning conference of staff officers at the headquarters used to be commonly referred to as morning prayers.

very warmly thanked us all and wished us good luck and success for the future. His letter to Kalwant Singh read, "I feel that you have been called upon to carry a very heavy load and though your shoulders are broad, I should have liked to have been in a position to maintain closer contact with you and lighten your task and responsibility." This summed up his view-point regarding his being allowed to visit the forward areas in Jammu and Kashmir.

General Cariappa took over command of Delhi and East Punjab Command on the 20th of January, 1948. As he was the senior Indian officer in the Army, both during the war and later, we had followed his career with interest and pride. It was but natural that all of us at the Headquarters which had by now become hundred per cent Indian (when we had started in 1947 I was the senior (!) Indian officer at the headquarters), were only too keen to give of our very best and offer our complete loyalty to our new commander. Cariappa was gifted with tremendous zeal and indefatigable energy. As for the latter, I may mention that although twenty-five years younger to him in age, I at times found it physically difficult to keep pace with him during his lightning tours. From the very first day he took over command, he impressed us with a sense of great urgency. Whether it was a knotty tactical or administrative problem or whether it was something concerning the minor details of the daily life at the headquarters, like wearing of bush shirts instead of tucked in shirts or the coir matting in the corridors being in a straight line, he applied himself to the problem with equal thoroughness. At times he was a staff officer's nightmare when he would give out points by the dozens in a fast moving jeep while the staff officer tried in vain to scribble them in his note-book. I often found my note-books filled with indecipherable drawings instead of any intelligible notes! But there were also occasions when he would himself write out long letters complete in every aspect of minor staff duties, saying, "Army Commander directs that...." He would then send them to his staff officer to sign. As a staff officer accompanying him on his tours, I often found myself in the unusual position of signing drafts prepared

for me by my commander!

Operations in Kashmir were Cariappa's chief pre-occupation when he took over his new appointment. He had a very humane attitude to these operations as he had for other aspects of life. To quote some examples of the latter, I may mention that when salt was a rare commodity in salt in his jeep to distribute them to the poor and needy Srinagar Valley, he would invariably take a bag or two of he met on the roadside. Once he stopped his jeep to permit a heavily laden bullock cart to negotiate a steep climb, but not satisfied with this, he himself got down to push the cart so as to lighten the bullocks' burden! This humane attitude to life was also demonstrated in the message he wrote to be dropped over the enemy. His message read as follows: "I have just taken over command of the Delhi and East Punjab Command. I have seen the estimate of casualties inflicted on you by our troops and I see 2500 are estimated to have been killed. What a waste of your splendid people. I have served in Waziristan and in other parts of the Frontier for many years and I have met very large numbers of your kith and kin at various places. I have pleasant memories of friendly talks with them on roads, in your village and at sports meeting at our military camps. Why should you now be sacrificing your lives in Kashmir, when you all should be engaged in enjoying in your homes, the freedom we all have got since 15th August 1947.

I hate killing my fellow human beings, no matter what class, creed or religion they belong to. All classes are the same to me. I have said this on many an occasion in Waziristan, and there may be some amongst you here who may have heard it. We are children of the same God — Muslims and non-Muslims.

Should, however, you unfortunately decide to continue fighting here, I regret I shall be compelled to conduct operations with greater intensity, using more destructive weapons in order to restore law and order soon so that we can all live in peace. In the eyes of God, I shall not, in the circumstances, be doing a wrong thing in intensifying our operations. Stop fighting here and go back to your homes.

God bless you all."

In late January 1948, when Cariappa took over from Russell, the enemy had a total strength of approximately 30,000 fighting men in this theatre. This force consisted of 5000 "deserters" from Pakistan Army, 10,000 tribesmen and some 15,000 ex-servicemen from Bagh-Punch-Mirpur areas. We had by then concentrated against this large force some fifteen infantry battalions, one light armoured regiment, one field and one mountain regiment.

Within a week of assuming command, Cariappa was inspecting his troops in the forward areas. We flew in an auster aircraft. Accompanying him in an auster was not a very pleasant experience, as one had to sit crouched at an uncomfortable angle in the luggage/wireless compartment of the two-seater plane. If in later years I go down with lumbago, these auster flights no doubt would be the cause for it. Anyway, Naushera was one of the first few places Cariappa had chosen to visit as it was then the most threatened point. 50 Para Brigade under Usman was located at Naushera. This brigade had suffered the loss of Jhangar in December. Both its commander and its men were anxious to avenge the memory of that defeat. Cariappa went round the defences of Naushera with Usman. With his keen eye for mountain warfare, he at once realised the importance of a feature called Kot approximately five miles north-east of Naushera. Kot is the highest feature on a range of hills overlooking the Naushera-Tawi valley. It was at that time held by approximately one battalion of the enemy supported by medium machine guns and 3-inch mortars. To make the defence of Naushera secure, Cariappa wanted Kot captured immediately and he accordingly ordered Usman to do so. The importance of holding Kot was amply demonstrated only a week later during the battle of Naushera.

Usman launched his attack for the capture of Kot on

the 1st of February and very appropriately named the operation after the new Army Commander. He called it "Operation Kipper". He had worked out the deception plan for this operation very carefully. For three days prior to this operation he had shown considerable movement westwards from Naushera. Armoured cars were also moved in that direction to make the enemy believe that we were heading for Jhangar. This deception seems to have been successful for our attack on Kot achieved complete surprise. The troops for this operation were concentrated north of Naushera under the cover of darkness and a night attack was launched. About mid-night on the 1st of February, Usman advanced with two battalions against this range (2/2 Punjab on the left and 3 Maratha on the right). The Punjabis were to capture the Kot feature and the objective of the Marathas was Pathradi. To ensure secrecy, Usman had ordered wireless silence which was broken only a little before early dawn when those dark and silent hills suddenly echoed the Maratha war cries, "Har Har Mahadev" and "Chhatrapati Maharaj Shivaji Maharaj Ki Jai". Marathas grappled with the enemy with their bayonets and soon Pathradi was in our hands. On the left, similar success attended the assault of the Punjabis.

The enemy suffered about 150 killed in this operation. Surprise seems to have been complete, for the enemy left behind a large number of dead on the objective which was unusual for him. Large quantities of arms and ammunition including one machine-gun fell into our hands. The Marathas did themselves well in this operation as they captured 30 goats and could thus have an issue of fresh meat after a long time. They also captured the enemy's officers mess and found a sumptuous breakfast waiting for them on the objective. The enemy, however, reacted quickly and put in a sharp counter-attack against Kot, temporarily dislodging us from that feature. Usman immediately attacked Kot again with his reserves and recaptured it by 10 a.m. The battle for Kot had now been finally won and the ridge was firmly in our hands. The enemy made further attempts on the following night and on subsequent days to regain Kot, but his attacks were

repulsed.

The enemy's intention of putting in an all out effort to capture Naushera had been known to us for some time. We had been receiving reports of his concentrations in front of Naushera and of his brisk preparations for an attack. Our operation for the capture of Kot had been launched to forestall this offensive and to make Naushera more secure. During the night of 5th/6th February the enemy brought up a force of approximately 15,000 men for his offensive against us. At that time our garrison at Naushera comprised approximately 4500 men consisting of five infantry battalions, one squadron armoured cars and one battery each of field and mountain guns.

The enemy commenced his assault at dawn on the 6th of February and attacked Naushera from three directions. A force of 6000 attacked from the north and came up against our picquets at Taindhar and Kot. He co-ordinated this attack with approximately 5000 men from the west and another 4000 from the south. These attacks were supported by machine-guns and 3-inch mortars firing as batteries. Our picquets north of Naushera, at Taindhar and Kot came in for his special attention. He fired approximately 150 mortar bombs on Kot during this assault. The raiders came in waves and kept on "pouring in endless stream". The situation was very critical for the first four hours and we had to "let go everything we had" to keep the enemy at bay. One machine-gun fired over 9000 rounds at almost point blank range against these assaulting hordes. Our fighter aircraft based at Jammu soon joined the battle and rendered invaluable help to the ground forces.

The fighting on Taindhar hill had been particularly heavy. I Rajput were holding this feature and they had a platoon, approximately 30 strong, in this picquet. Being the highest feature in the vicinity the enemy rightly appreciated that Taindhar held the key to Naushera defences and he made repeated attempts to take this feature. The Rajput platoon held out gallantly and after three hours of hard fighting when it had broken up repeated assaults, it had only three men left, the remaining 27 having been either killed or wounded. Undaunted by these casualties,

they continued to hold out till a relief company arrived and reinforced them. During these attacks on Taindhar, there had been bitter hand to hand fighting in which on one occasion the Pathans had penetrated inside our defences before they could be driven out. It was during this fighting that Naik Yadunath Singh, a section commander of this platoon, distinguished himself. Despite being wounded in the thigh and his platoon being so badly mauled, he charged into the enemy's assaulting wave with a light machine-gun and broke up the assault. He got killed while attempting to do so but his daring action saved the situation. For his gallantry he was posthumously awarded Param Vir Chakra. There was also the instance of one of our non-combatants, a sweeper, gallantly rising to the occasion. Non-combatants are not armed* but this sweeper took the rifle of one of his wounded comrades and joined the picquet in keeping the enemy at bay. When his ammunition ran out he got hold of the sword of a dying Pathan and hacked to death three Pathans who had got inside the perimeter. He was very appropriately given a gallantry award.

Many other similar acts of gallantry were performed by officers and men of 50 Para Brigade on that critical day. Even the "Balak Sena" (Boys Army) raised by Usman, comprising 158 orphan children of Naushera had performed gallant deeds. These children, varying from 6 to 12 in age used to throng the men's kitchen for morsels of food. Usman formed them into a boys company and gave them shelter and food. Arrangements were made for their education and technical training. Some of them worked as apprentice in the engineer and workshop companies. During the battle of Naushera, many of these boys acted as messengers carrying messages from one picquet to another at considerable risk to themselves. Later, the Prime Minister presented gold watches to three of these boys for their brave conduct during this battle.

By mid-day of the 6th of February, the enemy's attack

* The situation in this regard has now changed. Non-combatants were combatised in 1971.

had been definitely beaten back. He tried mass tactics, hoping to crush us by his weight of numbers, but he failed miserably. His all out bid to capture Naushera proved very costly for him. The battlefield was littered with his dead that he had left behind. 963 enemy dead bodies were counted on the battlefield by our troops but there were many besides, whom the enemy had managed to recover. On a conservative estimate the enemy had suffered over 2000 killed and wounded. We also got a rich booty of captured arms and ammunition. Compared to his casualties, our own casualties were amazingly small—only 33 killed and 102 wounded. Thus ended the battle of Naushera with a complete victory for the defenders. It was the biggest battle of the Kashmir war, and the hero of this battle was the quiet unassuming Indian Commander, Brigadier Mohammad Usman.

Soon after the battle of Naushera, Cariappa decided to move his tactical headquarters to Jammu. We accordingly moved by road from Delhi to Jammu. I have vivid recollections of our tiring road journey from Pathankot to Jammu which took the best part of the day despite our convoy being allowed priority on the road. The Ravi, Ujh and Basantar had all to be forded in those days and it used to take hours before a convoy could cross any of these rivers. By late in the evening we arrived at Jammu and set up ourselves in our new location. In the beginning our tactical headquarters was located in very comfortable surroundings in the Maharaja's Guest House but later we moved to the Residency which was permanently taken over by us. A skeleton staff had come out with the tactical headquarters. "Rocky" Hira,* the DAQMG, and I were the two staff officers who had accompanied the Army Commander.

Cariappa wanted to exploit the success at Naushera and was planning certain offensive operations during the coming spring. We were at that time examining the possibilities of the following operations:

*Later Lieutenant General

(*a*) Recapture of Jhangar.
(*b*) Advance to Rajauri from Naushera.
(*c*) Advance to Bhimber thereby securing our southern flank.
(*d*) Advance from Uri to Domel in the Valley.

Priority had been given to the recapture of Jhangar. With Jhangar in our hands we could cut off the enemy's communications to Kotli and to his capital at Pallandri. Moreover, the memory of the retreat from Jhangar last December naturally still rankled with us. Operations for the advance to Domel had to wait for the snows to melt in the summer and could not be undertaken during the spring.

We could not pursue the enemy to Jhangar immediately after the Naushera battle as we did not have sufficient troops at Naushera at that time. It had been appreciated that a minimum of one brigade group would have to be kept in Naushera all the time as this important communication centre was vulnerable to enemy's attacks from the west, the north and the south. The advance to Jhangar required another brigade. Therefore the Jhangar operation had to wait till we moved another brigade for this purpose. By the end of the month, 19 Infantry Brigade was moved into this theatre and was concentrated in Naushera, thus freeing 50 Para Brigade for the advance to Jhangar.

When we arrived in Jammu with our tactical headquarters, our forces at Naushera were getting ready for the Jhangar operation. Kalwant Singh had moved with his tactical headquarters from Jammu to Naushera so as to personally conduct the coming operation. Extending from Uri in the north to Chhamb in the south, Kalwant Singh's command covered several hundred square miles. He had now under him six Indian Army Brigades plus two State Force brigades. It was therefore a misnomer to call his formation a division and Cariappa rightly changed the name from JAK* Division to JAK Force. It was about this time that our headquarters also was redesignated. Our

*Abbreviation for Jammu and Kashmir.

territorial limits were no longer confined to Delhi and East Punjab, as the State of Jammu and Kashmir and also the whole of Rajasthan comprised our area of responsibility. Moreover, Delhi and East Punjab was quite a mouthful for a name and Cariappa wanted something "shorter, snappier and more appropriate". Northern Command, North-Western Command and Western Command were all considered as possibilities. Northern Command was ruled out as it could be confused with the old Northern Command of pre-partition days which had gone to Pakistan. The choice ultimately fell on Western Command. Some of us did not feel too happy about our new designation for we feared that with our flair for abbreviations in the Army, we may abbreviate it to WC ! In the event, our fears were not unfounded for it is not uncommon now-a-days to occasionally find this unofficial abbreviation being used in correspondence.

Kalwant Singh had his forces concentrated and poised at Naushera for the long awaited Jhangar operation. We at Jammu had organised ourselves to follow his progress on the map. Suddenly, the weather revolted against us. It rained incessantly for several days turning the unmetalled roads into a quagmire of mud. No vehicle movement was possible on these roads. The D-day had to be postponed waiting for a break in the weather. In those days, my mornings used to begin with peeping out of the window of our operations room to see if there was any trace of the sun in the cloudy sky and then studying the daily meteorological reports which continued to be pessimistic for some time. Our disgust at the weather was amply expressed by Cariappa in his signal to Delhi, "curse this rain, it is pouring and has continued to hold up our well laid plans."

Thanks to the weather, we were virtually held prisoners in Jammu. The Pathankot-Jammu road was out of commission; the three rivers on this road were in flood. To the west we could not go beyond Akhnur as the Chenab was overflowing. The Jammu airstrip was only a fair weather landing ground and could not be used. Cariappa thought that he might take a trip north to Srinagar as the snows on the Banihal Pass may soon begin to melt. No

senior commander had visited this snow-bound sector after the onset of the last winter. We accordingly set out for Srinagar but half-way at Batot, we nearly got trapped. There were several landslides on the road and we had to return to Jammu. The only way of breaking this ring formed by the weather round us was to break out through Sialkot in Pakistan ! There was a tarmac road connecting Jammu with Sialkot across the border. It was a peculiar situation because although Pakistan was fighting us in Kashmir, officially the two countries were still at peace and were sister dominions in the same Commonwealth. Cariappa asked me to telephone the GSO 1 of Lahore Area asking for permission to proceed via Sialkot to Lahore and thence to India. We knew that Pakistan would never agree to this but still it was thought that we might make an attempt. The Pakistan General at Lahore, General Iftikhar Khan, was an old friend of Cariappa and only a month earlier had invited him to the cavalry week at Lahore. When I got through on the telephone to the GSO 1 of Lahore who was a British officer, he was as surprised as the operators who I am sure must be listening to our conversation, out of sheer curiosity. He promised to ring back after speaking to his General. Later we received a polite reply that General Iftikhar was out on tour and Begum Iftikhar was indisposed. Therefore it would be awkward for them to receive General Cariappa at that time!

Having made us wait for weeks, the weather did ultimately clear up in the second week of March. We feared that our concentrations west of Naushera may have given away our intention of advancing to Jhangar. Cariappa therefore thought that we might examine the possibility of using this as a deception and advancing north to Rajauri. He asked me to send a long message to Kalwant Singh about this possibility. I drafted the signal and got it approved by him but I forgot to enter the security classification on the message. I discovered my mistake only a few hours later when I was in the plane on my way to Delhi for some other important business. To my horror I found that the typist had put down "unclassified" on the signal

instead of "top secret" as it should have been. The signal contained various top secret details like the new objective, the D-day, and the size of the force for the impending operation. Visions of a court martial and the premature ending of my army career conjured themselves before me in the plane. I spent a most anxious time in the aircraft waiting to reach Delhi. Immediately on landing at Delhi I used the Army Commander's name to book a clear-the-line call to the signal office at Jammu and inquire whether or not that signal had been despatched. To my great and intense relief I was told that the wireless operator seeing the contents of the signal had on his own initiative graded it top secret and sent it to the cipher office. I breathed a sigh of relief and wiped the beads of perspiration from my forehead. That signalman had saved my commission as also prevented the security of the plan being compromised.

The plans for the capture of Jhangar had catered for 19 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Yadunath Singh* to establish a bridgehead at Naushera through which 50 Para Brigade commanded by Usman would break out towards Jhangar. Kalwant Singh had very appropriately earmarked 50 Para Brigade for recapturing Jhangar as they had to avenge their defeat of December last. All ranks of the brigade were delighted at the prospect and I quote below the order of the day issued by Usman for this operation:

> Comrades of 50 Para Brigade,
> Time has come when our planning and preparation for the recapture of Jhangar is to be put to test. It is not an easy task but I am confident of success—because our plan is sound and our preparations have been good. More so, because I have complete confidence in you all to do your best to recapture the ground we lost on 24th December and to retrieve the honour of our arms.
> The hopes and the aspirations of our countrymen are based upon our efforts. We must not falter—we must not

* Later Major General.

fail them.

To every man upon this Earth,
Death cometh soon or late;
And how man can die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his father
And the Temples of his Gods.

So forward friends, fearless we go to Jhangar. India expects everyone to do his duty.

Jai Hind!

Mohammad Usman
Brigadier

The advance to Jhangar commenced on the 15th of March with initially both 19 and 50 Brigades advancing on either side of the road. Deception had also been arranged. Along with this advance a force was to demonstrate north from Naushera. Our advance made good progress. Soon Gaikot Forest and Darhal Fort on the road to Jhangar were secured. The enemy fled westwards in panic. The decisive battle for the recapture of Jhangar, however, was fought at Pirthal, a steep hill overlooking Jhangar. The Patialas and the Marathas of 50 Brigade moved to the foot of this hill by night. The following day they captured this formidable hill. With Pirthal in our hands, the enemy's position at Jhangar became untenable and he promptly withdrew. Our troops then victoriously entered Jhangar. The whole operation had worked out like a Staff College exercise with everything done strictly according to plan. The Air Force played a very valuable part in this operation by giving intimate and timely support to the ground troops. A large booty fell in our hands at Jhangar, including vehicles, stores, arms and ammunition.

Jhangar, in our hands, became a thorn in the enemy's side, a thorn which he repeatedly tried to remove but in vain. Usman and his brigade were firmly installed manning the defences of this strategic position and were deter-

mined not to allow the enemy another opportunity of getting into this town.

About this time, towards the end of March the winter isolation of Srinagar Valley was also broken and Cariappa managed to get up north. 161 Infantry Brigade at Uri had been successfully holding out against enemy's attempt to bypass or overrun its defences during the difficult winter months. I accompanied the Army Commander on this visit. As we crossed Mahura on our way to Uri, the enemy started sniping us from the hills at some distance from the road. Cariappa was unruffled and he would not accept the suggestion of removing his flag and star plates from his jeep. He said that he knew the Pathan as an excellent marksman and he wanted to test whether these snipers were genuine Pathans! This was certainly not my idea of getting identifications of the enemy but luckily we passed the danger zone without any mishap. I can recall a similar incident at Tithwal where to the great anxiety of everyone, he stood in the open near a known enemy mortar DF (defensive fire) task which was under observation from an enemy OP (observation post). Soon after we moved away from that position an enemy bomb landed on that bit of open ground. He remained absolutely calm and gave a rather contemptuous look towards the bomb which had burst with a thunder but had failed to do any damage. Cariappa talked to the men of the Uri brigade, who were, if anything, looking fitter after their winter isolation. It was inspiring to see them all so cheerful. A sepoy told the General that he was not worried about going home on leave or being isolated by the snows. He first wanted to finish the job in hand. Cariappa explained to the men that they would have to wait for another month or so for the summer before we could launch any offensive operations in the Valley.

While we had gone up north, Kalwant Singh in the south was finalising his plans for another offensive, the advance to Rajauri. Rajauri is approximately 30 miles north-west of Naushera and lies on the old Moghul route to Kashmir. Half-way between Naushera and Rajauri is Chingas, where the fourth Mughal Emperor, Jehangir, is said to have died on his way back from Srinagar. The beautiful Nur Jahan

decided to take her husband's body to Lahore and got a large mausoleum built there for the late Emperor. However, on the advice of her physicians she agreed to have the dead Emperor's intestines taken out and buried at Chingas. What interested us at that time about Rajauri or Chingas, was not their historical association but the fact that we had received several reports of the enemy perpetuating barbaric atrocities in that area. Cariappa had ordered Kalwant Singh to capture Rajauri after securing Jhangar.

The plans for the advance to Rajauri had again been worked out in great detail. There had been considerable enemy activity in Mirpur-Sadabad area presenting a potential threat to our southern flank. It was, therefore, necessary to have our defences at Beripattan, Naushera and Jhangar secure to meet this threat. 50 Para Brigade at Jhangar was asked to demonstrate North towards Kotli and this deception was to be coordinated with the northward drive from Naushera to Rajauri by 19 Infantry Brigade. The advance to Rajauri started on the 8th of April and progressed seven miles on the first day. During this advance the Dogras had assaulted and captured the Barwali ridge. The enemy had well-prepared positions on this ridge supported by 3-inch mortars but the Dogras proved too good for him. Later in the afternoon he counter attacked but he was easily repulsed. Beyond Barwali, the advance was carried out on a broad front with the infantry moving along the line of hills on either side of the road and the tanks keeping to the road. The engineers did an excellent job in this operation in clearing the road of mines to enable our tanks to advance. Rane was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for his outstanding gallantry in performing this task. We entered Chingas on the 10th and found it in flames. The enemy was on the run and was resorting to scorched earth policy. Our advance continued and on the 12th we were in Rajauri, liquidating *en route* several well prepared positions and roadblocks. This operation cost the enemy approximately 500 dead and it was yet another success for our arms.

Our jubilation at the capture of Rajauri was, however, considerably dampened by the sight of the atrocities that

awaited us in that city. Although our troops arrived in the nick of time to save the lives of about 300 refugees who had been lined up to be shot, there were several other unfortunate ones, who had already been disposed of before we arrived. We found three gaping pits full of corpses, each 50 square yards in area and 15 feet deep. The enemy had carried out a general massacre of the local non-Muslim population prior to his withdrawal. These pits were later shown to Dr Wenger, a representative of the International Red Cross. The atrocities committed by the enemy at Rajauri had even surpassed his black record of Baramula.

A press correspondent who had accompanied us to Rajauri sent back a flowery despatch. He wrote : "with snow-clad mountains in the North, river Tawi flowing along the line of temples in the East and green hills with pine trees in the West, the small town of Rajauri presents an excellent view from a distance of one mile. The green fields with their golden crust and the crystal clear blue waters of the Tawi are indeed very pleasing sights. But as one approaches near, one sees dead bodies of men and animals, surrounded by dogs and vultures. The city itself is half burnt and has an eerie silence about it with all the survivors of the massacre having taken to the hills. Rajauri is a city of the dead and the dying."

We had no sooner arrived in Rajauri and secured our positions than refugees in large numbers started coming down from the hills. They were all starved, pale and half-naked skeletons but they had tears of gratitude in their eyes for the Indian troops who had liberated them. Such had been their suffering that in some cases they had lost their memory to the extent that they could not even recall their names easily. They all poured into our perimeter in their hundreds—both Muslims and Hindus—and we were only too happy to give shelter and protection to these grief-stricken people.

Summer was fast approaching and the time had now come for us to undertake offensive operations also in the Kashmir Valley. With the set up of command as it then existed in Jammu and Kashmir, it was difficult to conduct operations both in the valley and in Jammu province with

only one divisional headquarters. The size of our force in this theatre had also been steadily increasing. There were now seven Indian Army brigades operating in this theatre and we were planning to move an additional brigade soon. A re-organisation was, therefore, necessary prior to our starting our summer offensive. The need for this re-organisation was increasingly felt during the Jhangar and Rajauri operations when Kalwant Singh at Naushera had also to think about his brigade at Uri, a distance of about 330 miles by road!

The old JAK Force was now split into two divisions with Sri (Srinagar) Division in the Valley and Ja (Jammu) Division in Jammu province. Major General* K.S. Thimayya, DSO, one of our distinguished commanders in Burma during the last war took over command of Sri Division and Major General Atma Singh was given the command of Ja Division. Brigadier† M.S. Wadalia, our then Brigadier General Staff was naturally averse to using "Jam" as an abbreviation for Jammu and our choice therefore fell on "Ja". Later these names were replaced by numerals, when Sri became 19 and Ja 26. A line of communication sub area was also formed under the command of Brigadier Jai Singh.** This Sub Area was designed to take over the administrative commitments of the Pathankot rail-head and beyond to the fighting divisions, so as to leave the latter free to conduct operations. Tactical Headquarters, Western Command, remained at Jammu and was to be in overall command of all the forces in this theatre.

This reorganisation was completed by the 4th of May 1948 and Kalwant Singh who had hitherto commanded our forces in Jammu and Kashmir for the past seven months relinquished his command of the old JAK Force. He now became the Chief of the General Staff of the Indian Army. He had successfully carried out a very difficult assignment. Starting from scratch and with limited resources he had

*Later General and Chief of the Army Staff.
†Later Lieutenant General.
**Later Major General.

conducted successful operations on vastly separated fronts. He had led his troops from their back to the wall at Srinagar to Uri in the north and to Jhangar and Rajauri in the south and in the process had liberated several thousand square miles of State territory.

4

Our Summer Offensive

THERE WAS considerable activity in Kashmir Valley during the early summer of 1948. We were getting ready for our summer offensive. 161 Infantry Brigade located in Uri had cleared the hills on either side of Mahura-Uri road as a preliminary to the launching of this offensive. Two additional brigades, 77 Para and 165, had been moved into the Valley and a divisional headquarters had been set up at Srinagar. The new divisional commander, Major General Thimayya, with his characteristic ease of manners and his great capacity to mix with all at their own levels, soon established a very personal link between himself and his division. He was affectionately referred to as "Timmy" by even the most newly-commissioned subaltern of his division. The JCOs and other ranks also referred to him in similar terms with the suffix "Sahib" added to his name. This only indicated the measure of his personal popularity and the regard in which he was held by his officers and men. We used to refer to his visits to the units or his presence among the troops, specially when things appeared gloomy, as "Timmy tonic" for morale. Kumaonis whom he had so successfully commanded during the last war in Burma and who were now in his division, started a rum cocktail called "Timmy tonic".

With the approach of summer melting the snows, the concentration of additional troops and the appointment of Thimayya, an ace field commander of our army, to command the troops in the Valley, our offensive intentions

must have become apparent to the enemy. The enemy could not have had any doubts as to the target of this offensive. Domel on the Kashmir/Pakistan border would be our obvious objective as it controlled the major routes entering into Kashmir from Pakistan. About this time, I remember reading an amazingly well-informed article by a military correspondent in the Pakistan Times. He had published grossly exaggerated reports of the strength of our concentrations in the Valley—100,000 more men in addition to our winter strength of 11 brigades in the theatre! However, his tactical appraisal was very analytical. He dwelt on our administrative difficulties over the 300-mile long line of communication from our railhead at Pathankot, making the maintenance of large forces in the Valley a difficult proposition. He brought out that we would accord priority to an advance from Uri to Domel so as to seal the border and at the same time drive a wedge between the northern and the southern sectors of the so called "Azad" territory. He also appreciated that this thrust from Uri to Domel would be accompanied by an outflanking movement from the North-West. He rightly observed that the nature of terrain between Uri and Domel with the road going through a narrow defile flanked by high mountains on either side, was ideally suited for defence. He, therefore, expressed confidence in their ability to hold out in this sector but he advocated counter-measures by Pakistan to threaten Srinagar valley in the North via Gurais and in the East via Kargil. This article had been published only a few days before our advance from Uri commenced but the surprising thing was how Pakistan had allowed the publication of such an article in the newspaper. It read almost like a military appreciation prepared by the General Staff of Pakistan Army Headquarters. Still more surprising was the fact that the future course of operations followed by the enemy coincided with the pattern suggested in this article.

The objective of our summer offensive was Domel in Muzaffrabad district. Domel was over 50 miles from our forward positions at Uri. The road to Domel ran close to and parallel with the Jhelum gorge flanked by mountains

varying from 6,000 to 10,000 feet in height. There were also twenty-two destroyed/destroyable bridges on this road beyond our positions up to Domel. We had, therefore, no illusions about the difficulties presented by the terrain for an advance to Domel. The difficulties of bridging the Jhelum had also been appreciated and it had been decided that the main force should advance astride the road and the hills to the South of it, with only a flank guard moving along the hills North of the Jhelum. As it was difficult to achieve surprise during this advance, a diversionary operation had been arranged in the North-West towards Tithwal.

Thimayya planned to use two brigades for this operation which was given the code name of Behram. 77 Para Brigade under Brigadier Nair was to take over the defences of Uri from 161 Infantry Brigade who, after their seven months in this area, were fully acclimatised to the terrain and the climate. This brigade, under Sen, was to commence the advance to Domel on the 20th of May. Harbakhsh with 163 Infantry Brigade located in Handwara-Kupwara area was to start the diversionary operation towards Tithwal two days earlier, on the 18th of May. Our estimate of enemy strength opposing us at that time was approximately one brigade group based at Chakothi opposite Uri and some 1600 irregulars scattered in small parties in Tithwal sector. It is important to remember that we did not at that stage expect Pakistan Army to openly take the field against us by moving in regular battalions and brigades to occupy defences on those formidable hills. Hitherto Pakistan had been covertly helping the raiders with arms, ammunition and "deserters" from her regular army to bolster up the "Azad" units and it was expected that this pattern of activity would continue.

Sen's advance was to be conducted in three phases. Chinari (15 miles from Uri), Garhi (30 miles from Uri) and Domel were the successive objectives for these phases. In the first phase, one battalion was to advance along hills North of Jhelum to Pandu, Kathai and the hills overlooking Chinari from the North while two battalions were to advance to Chinari along the hills South of the river. One

squadron of armoured cars with one battalion was to advance along the road keeping pace with the two columns moving over the hills on either flank. In Handwara sector, Harbakhsh was to advance West on two axes. He planned for two battalions from Handwara and one from Kupwara to secure Dogarpur and Trahagam ridges respectively prior to the capture of Chokibal. After the capture of Chokibal he was to attack the 10,000 feet high Nastachur Pass and advance towards Tithwal.

The order of battle of the two brigades to be employed for this offensive was as follows:

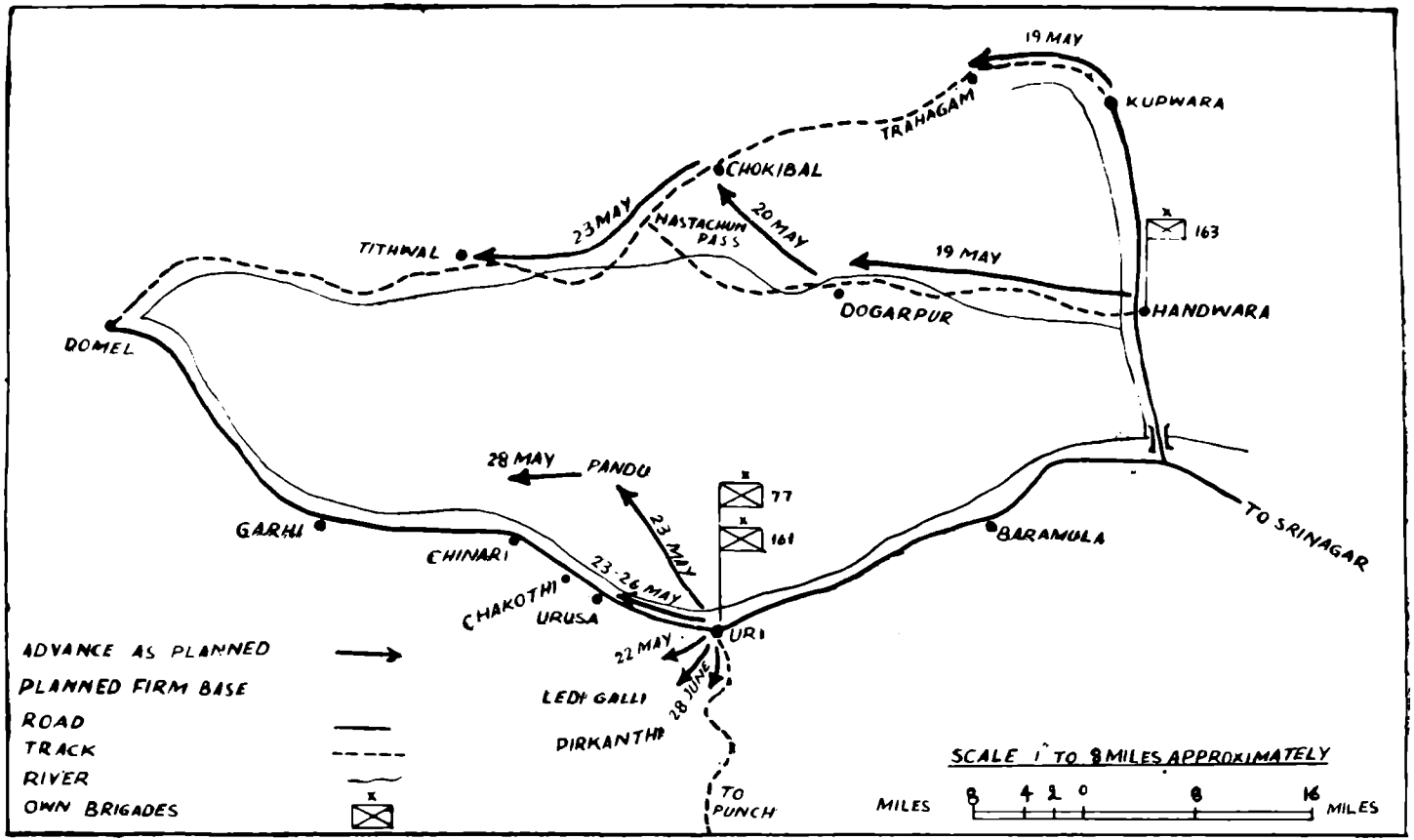
(a) 161 Infantry Brigade
One squadron 7 Cavalry (armoured cars)
Patiala Mountain Battery
11 Field Regiment less one battery
6 Rajputana Rifles
7 Sikh Regiment
2 Dogra Regiment
4 Kumaon Regiment

(b) 163 Infantry Brigade
One squadron 7 Cavalry (armoured cars)
4 J and K Mountain Battery
One battery 11 Field Regiment
1 Madras Regiment
1 Sikh Regiment
3 Garhwal Rifles

The concentration of these two brigades was completed by the middle of May. 77 Para Brigade comprising 2 Madras, 2/3 Gorkha Rifles, Jaipur Swai Man Guards and a militia battalion took over the defence of Uri firm base, thereby relieving 161 Infantry Brigade for its offensive task. Issue of orders and briefing of the men were duly completed. The battalion commanders taking part in this operation were taken out on an aerial reconnaissance over the area of operations. We at the headquarters got ready to follow the progress of the battles. Everything was now set for the start of the summer offensive and we were all awaiting the D-day.

The operations commenced on the night of 18th/19th May with an advance from Handwara. Harbakhsh advanced on two axes as planned, the Madrasis from Handwara to Dogarpur ridge and the Garhwalis from Kupwara to Trahagam ridge. Both these ridges which were his objectives for the first phase were secured by the following day. The Madrasis had achieved complete surprise and the enemy fled in small parties but the Garhwalis had to do some stiff fighting before they could secure their objectives. Enemy mortars had been particularly active on the Garhwali front. The next day, that is, the 20th, while the Madrasis and the Garhwalis were sealing off routes along which the enemy could escape, the Sikhs advanced through the Madrasis and captured Chokibal. Chokibal is on the foot of the hill from where the climb starts to Nastachur Pass. Determined not to allow the enemy any respite, Harbakhsh got the Madrasis to take the lead again. By nightfall that day the Madrasis were only three miles short of Nastachur Pass. It will thus be seen that these diversionary operations had yielded promising results. We felt that if Nastachur Pass could be crossed quickly there would be a glittering prize awaiting us at Tithwal which was the main base of the enemy in that sector. It was, however, anticipated that the enemy would put up a stiff fight on top of the pass.

When Harbakhsh had reached the foot of Nastachur Pass, Sen set out from Uri with the main column on the night of 20th/21st May. While Sen's left hook led by the Dogras advanced towards Salamabad and Point 7300 in the South, the Kumaonis advanced North of the river towards an important hill feature called Pandu, approximately 9 miles North-West of Uri. The assault on Salamabad failed to achieve surprise and the enemy got alerted before we could reach this position. He opened up heavy automatic and mortar fire. We were held up against Salamabad for a day but the next day, that is, 22nd May, we captured both this ridge and Point 7300. The Kumaonis advancing on the right secured Point 6430 the same day and later captured Pandu on 23rd May. Here a complete ration and ammunition dump fell into our hands. Prisoners belonging to



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regular Pakistan Army were captured. The advance of the Kumaonis had progressed very satisfactorily and they had liquidated the opposition put up by approximately one battalion of the enemy. The advance of the brigade South of the road, however, encountered stiff opposition. Here the enemy was fighting for every inch of ground in those excellent delaying positions.

Harbakhsh's advance towards Tithwal continued to progress satisfactorily. Having spent the night of 20th/21st May, 3 miles short of Nastachur Pass, the Madrasis advanced the following morning towards the Pass. The Pass was just out of range of our field guns located at Chokibal and it was feared that the Madrasis would have to put in their attack without any field artillery support, but Providence came to their rescue. The Field Battery Commander discovered that some of his 25-pounders were over-shooting by about 400-500 yards, and that was just the extra range we required. The enemy, however, put up only a token resistance on top of the Pass and after an hour's fighting the Madrasis captured this formidable defile. The Sikhs then took the lead and by that evening advanced a further six miles towards Tithwal. The Madrasis had to spend that night on top of the 10,000 feet Pass without any great-coats and blankets as the speed of the advance had outstripped the slow pace of the administrative echelon following behind on mules. Being over 10,000 feet high this Pass is extremely cold even in May and like other Himalayan passes, it is notorious for a piercing and ceaseless wind. The discomfort of the Madrasis, coming from South India, where cold winter is not known, can well be imagined. The advance beyond continued and by the morning of 23rd May, Tithwal had been captured by the Sikhs. There was again the same old story repeated in Tithwal of enemy brutalities perpetuated against the helpless non-Muslim local population.

23rd of May marked the high water mark of our success in these operations. The diversionary column led by Harbakhsh had advanced 40 miles in six days through difficult roadless country and across a formidable 10,000 feet high mountain pass. It had in the process accounted for 67

counted killed of the enemy, and captured a large number of prisoners and arms including one 3-inch mortar. Sen's main column, on the other hand, had advanced 11 miles in three days against a well-determined and well-organised enemy holding excellent defensive positions on dominating heights. It had also inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy and had counted 126 corpses left by the enemy on those hills. Despite stiff opposition, Sen continued his advance but this was now inevitably slow as the fighting had become a "hard slogging match" with certain hill features frequently changing hands.

By the 27th it was obvious that the frontal assault towards Domel from Urusa (11 miles from Uri) had slender chances of success. Increasing evidence was now pouring in of the direct participation of the regular Pakistan Army in these battles; we had also captured several regular Pakistani soldiers. It had now been fully established that opposing Sen astride the road near Urusa was a Pakistan brigade comprising four regular battalions (4/15 Punjab Machine Gun Regiment, 4/16 Punjab Regiment, 1/13 Frontier Force Rifles and 4/13 Frontier Force Rifles). This brigade had its headquarters at Chakothi.

In view of the strong opposition along the road, Thimayya now decided to revise the plans and attempt an outflanking manoeuvre. He concentrated 77 Para Brigade under Nair behind Pandu feature and gave this brigade the task of advancing along the hills North of Jhelum to Point 6065 near Kathai approximately four miles behind the enemy at Chakothi. With Point 6065 in our hands we hoped to dominate the enemy's line of communication and this threat to his rear might force him to abandon his forward positions opposing Sen. This hook to Point 6065 was to be completed by 31st May and thereafter Sen was to break through the enemy positions at Chakothi. To coordinate with this revised plan, Harbakhsh was asked to send a battalion column from Tithwal towards Muzaffrabad.

Both the columns, to Point 6065 in Uri sector and towards Muzaffarabad from Tithwal, moved on animal transport basis. They were dependent on the air for main-

tenance and offensive support. They were advancing through roadless and mountainous country where field artillery pieces could not be taken and hence the necessity for reliance on the air for both maintenance and offensive support. Nair's column from Pandu made a good start and captured a 7,000 feet high feature some two miles beyond Pandu. It was at this stage that the weather suddenly took an adverse turn. It rained incessantly for several days grounding all our aircraft at the fair-weather airfield in Srinagar. Even the mules with these columns could hardly move along those slippery and narrow mountain tracks. Surprise had been lost and the enemy soon moved in reinforcements to block our advance along these routes. In view of these developments, this operation had to be reluctantly called off and troops were ordered back to their firm base.

Our advance from Uri to Urusa and from Handwara to Tithwal appears to have spread great alarm and despondency in the enemy ranks. Our capture of Tithwal, only 18 miles from Domel, had become a dangerous salient for the enemy. It was at this stage that 9 Frontier Division of the Pakistan Army, commanded by Major General Nazir Ahmed was moved into the Kashmir Vale to reinforce enemy troops already in this sector. This division had a brigade at Chakothi which had been contacted by Sen's column and another brigade under Brigadier Gulzar Ahmed facing us in Tithwal. The latter brigade comprised 2/8 Punjab Regiment, 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment, 4/12 Frontier Force Regiment and possibly also 5/12 Frontier Force Regiment. The third brigade of this division was located at Domel itself.

With the arrival of these fresh troops there was now heavier fighting at the forward positions. A division against another division in that defensive country did not provide the requisite superiority for a successful offensive. In Tithwal sector the enemy started fierce counter-attacks against the Sikhs and the Madrasis supported by heavy artillery and mortar concentrations. These attacks were successfully repulsed with heavy casualties to the enemy after hand to hand fighting between the opposing troops.

The attack against the Sikhs had started on Friday the 1st June and against Madrasis on Friday the 8th June. We later discovered that Friday was considered an auspicious day by the enemy for opening his attacks and he used to work his troops to a state of religious frenzy after the "Jumma" prayers. 163 Infantry Brigade in Tithwal had now cleared the area up to the line of the Kishenganga river and destroyed the bridges across the river. On the Urusa front also the enemy had been active but had been effectively dealt with by our troops. Later he brought 5.5-inch medium guns and shelled our positions. We in turn also brought up medium guns by air from Ambala to Srinagar and thence by road to Uri.

His plans for a right hook having failed in the Uri sector primarily due to bad weather, Thimayya now attempted a wide left hook from Uri. 77 Para Brigade was recalled to Uri and it again relieved 161 Infantry Brigade for this wide sweep. 161 Infantry Brigade now advanced south from Urusa towards Pirkanthi and Ledigalli. Both Pirkanthi and Ledigalli are over 10,000 feet high and are about 6 miles south of Uri-Domel road. To co-ordinate with the southern advance of 161 Infantry Brigade, the brigade at Punch was to demonstrate towards Bagh.

Sen commenced his southern advance on three axes and by 14th June the first objectives on these axes were all captured—Jaipur Swai Man Guards captured the 10,658 feet high Khilla Dher feature, 6 Rajputana Rifles Point 8356 and 2/3 Gorkha Rifles Point 8570. This advance had forestalled a dangerous outflanking move by enemy along Pirkanthi ridge towards Uri with a view to cutting off our line of communication behind Urusa. With the capture of these initial objectives, the stage was now set for the assault on Pirkanthi and Ledigalli. The initial assault against Pirkanthi by the Gorkhas on the 21st failed but the Gorkhas were determined to take this feature despite all difficulties. A week had to elapse (bad weather intervened during this period) before we could put in our second attack. A friend of mine, Major Pathak, who was wounded in the assault while leading his company to the top of Pirkanthi, later gave me the details of this assault.

The Gorkhas formed up for the assault under cover of darkness and put in a silent attack against this position which had now been further reinforced by the enemy after our first unsuccessful attempt. The objective was a few thousand feet above the start line but the Gorkhas confidently scrambled up the steep climb. The enemy, however, got alerted as our troops approached his position and started lobbing grenades down the hillside which accounted for a large number of leg wounds amongst the assaulting troops. Undeterred, the Gorkhas went forward shouting their famous war cry "Ayo Gorkhali" (the Gorkhas have come) and made short work of the enemy with their kukhris. The enemy ran in panic leaving behind 54 of his dead on the feature. There were several more wounded and dead amongst the enemy—many of the latter having been recovered by him. Our casualties during this assault were 7 killed and 51 wounded. Pirkanthi, which is 10,930 feet high, was the highest feature hitherto assaulted by us and its capture had a special significance for our subsequent advance to the lower hill features in that area. On the same day, that is 28th June, Jaipur Swai Man Guards captured Ledigalli, a 10,000 feet high feature.

Immediately after the capture of Pirkanthi and Ledigalli, we received orders from the Government to stop further offensive operations in Jammu and Kashmir. This decision was in response to an appeal made by the United Nations. A period of static operations now set in, in which as we shall see later, the enemy temporarily gained the initiative.

Thus ended our summer offensive in the Valley. Our final objective, Domel, remained in enemy hands. Examining these summer operations in retrospect one feels that we would perhaps have done better to undertake this offensive with a bigger force despite the difficulties of maintenance. There was of course the eternal shortage of troops and commanders had to make do with whatever that could be made available. A reserve brigade to exploit the success at Tithwal and turn that operation from a diversionary thrust into an outflanking manoeuvre may have got us into Domel before the enemy's reinforcements came

to his rescue. The maintenance of this brigade would have been a great strain on the quartermasters but air supply may have provided the answer and in the event, the weather remained all right till the end of May. For the present, however, we had to accept the fact that the weather, the terrain and Pakistan's fresh reinforcements had prevented us from reaching our goal--Domel. Yet our gains had been substantial and in this respect we had got the better of the enemy. Our advance may have been slow but in every single encounter we had got the measure of the enemy's strength and defeated him in almost every engagement. In terms of territory, we liberated 350 square miles during this offensive.

While our summer offensive for the advance to Domel was in progress, the enemy was acting elsewhere in the Valley in accordance with the counter measures suggested by his military correspondent in the Pakistan Times. He had been carrying out depredations in the Gurais valley, 50 miles North of Srinagar, and had also been advancing into Ladakh. He had captured Kargil, 90 miles east of Srinagar in May. These activities presented a danger to Srinagar both from the North and from the East. Thimayya promptly decided to deal with this menace and sent a two battalion column of 1 Grenadiers and 2/4 Gorkha Rifles under Lieutenant Colonel* Rajinder Singh to capture Gurais. Another battalion, 1 Patiala Infantry, which had been moved up from the Jammu province was sent to block the eastern approach into Srinagar across the Zoji La.

Gurais is a narrow valley through which the Kishenganga flows from East to West, flanked on either side by high mountain ranges going up to 16,000 feet in height. The route from Srinagar to Gurais goes over the 11,500 feet Razdhanangan Pass and beyond it the track goes across the Burzilbai Pass to Gilgit. The enemy had been moving into this valley both from the West along the Kishenganga and the North from Gilgit. From Gurais he could move south-west along the Tilel valley threatening the road running East from Srinagar towards Ladakh

* Later Brigadier.

via Zoji La. He could also come down South across the Razdhanangan into the Srinagar Valley. At that time we had received information that there were about 1000 enemy troops in Gurais valley comprising the Frontier Constabulary, the Chitral Scouts and the Gilgit Scouts led by regular officers of the Pakistan Army. According to enemy messages intercepted on the wireless it appeared that he was expecting further reinforcements shortly. It was, therefore, necessary that we struck quickly and cleared Gurais before the threat in this area assumed dangerous proportions. The capture of Gurais would also help us in developing our operations towards Skardu where our garrison was still holding out.

By 22nd June, Rajinder Singh concentrated his column of two battalions and one mountain battery at Tragbal. On the 24th the Gorkhas carried out a diversionary raid and the following day the advance to Gurais commenced. This operation involved the assault of a series of steep snow-covered hills. The first assault was on a 12,857 feet feature and it culminated in the successful attack on the forbidding 14,218 feet Kesar peak in a blizzard. The Grenadiers, on crossing Razdhanangan Pass, advanced to Gurais via Viji Gali while the Gorkhas advanced to Kanzalwan. This operation was successfully concluded by the evening of the 27th when both Gurais and Kanzalwan were captured. The enemy fled in disorder to the North leaving large stores including blankets which came in very handy for our troops.

With the Gurais valley in our hands, we succeeded in eliminating the threat to Srinagar from the North. The Patialas, sent East into the Sonamarg valley, encountered small parties of raiders that had come across the Zoji La. They soon chased the enemy beyond the pass. Thus the threat from the East was also successfully removed.

While in the Kashmir Valley, we were advancing towards Domel and Gurais, Atma Singh commanding 26 Infantry Division in the South was consolidating his positions in Jammu province. Intensified and vigorous patrolling was carried out from our firm bases and several local gains achieved. A relief column was despatched from Rajauri

towards Punch under Brigadier* Yadunath Singh commanding 19 Infantry Brigade. This column set out from Rajauri on the 15th of June and linked up with a battalion column from Punch at Potha, half-way between Rajauri and Punch on the 17th. Yadunath's column returned via Mendhar after the link-up, bringing back 1000 refugees. In this link-up operation we had inflicted 122 counted killed on the enemy at the cost of 11 killed and 17 wounded to ourselves. As we did not then have sufficient troops to protect the road, this link-up was only a temporary phase and Punch again reverted to its state of isolation from our other positions.

Brigadier Mohamad Usman had been hailed as the hero of Naushera, all over India. He had, however, also attracted particular hostility of the enemy. Pakistan, which had been formed on the basis of the two-nation theory sprung from religious intolerance, could not appreciate the role of a Muslim in "Hindu India". Our attitude in India then was, as happily it has always been, that religion is not the basis of nationality. A Muslim is as much an Indian as any Hindu. In secular India, unlike theocratic Pakistan, there is of course no question of the minorities being treated as second class citizens. Usman was a patriotic Indian and the Government had very rightly given him a position of trust—the command of one of our forward brigades in the fighting line. He amply justified the trust reposed in him and had very deservedly won popular acclaim.

We used to hear that in Pakistan a prize had been announced for Usman's head. By virtue of serving in the Indian Army he was regarded as a "traitor to the holy fold". The shattering defeat which he had inflicted on them had further intensified their hostility towards him. At times the enemy had even spread deliberately false rumours of his death. I remember that in late June, one such false rumour had been spread and had perhaps even featured in the Pakistan press. On hearing this report, Usman's brother had made anxious inquiries from us. Brigadier Sarda Nand Singh,* our Brigadier-in charge, Administra-

* Later Major General.

tion, had sent a signal to Usman inquiring about his welfare. He received a cheerful reply from him, "fit and flourishing—still in the world of living."

It was ironical that we received Usman's reply a few hours after he had been killed. When I received the sad news of his death on the telephone, I could hardly believe it, for only an hour earlier I had received his message for Sarda Nand. But alas, it was true. He had been killed during the enemy shelling at Jhangar on the night of 3rd/4th July. The enemy artillery had been very active that night and had fired some 600 shells into our positions. One of these shells had landed near Usman's bunker and had killed him instantaneously.

Usman had distinguished himself as a fearless and outstanding soldier in action. He had also won the esteem and affection of both his men and the local civil population. At his death there were rejoicings in the enemy camp. But his death was a tragedy for us and for me it was a personal loss. I had had the privilege of knowing him for some time and he had always impressed me with his quiet simplicity and genuine sincerity. The Government decided to give him a State funeral with full military honours and his body was flown to Delhi for the last rites. Delhi citizens turned out in their thousands to pay their last homage to this brave son of India who had laid down his life fighting for his country. As the last post was sounded at Mehrauli that evening and his body laid to eternal rest, I raised my hand in salute. I recalled the famous lines from Horatius, which Usman had quoted in his order of the day for his victorious advance to Jhangar—

> And how can man die better
> Than facing fearful odds,
> For the ashes of his father
> And the temples of his Gods.

After all attempts to secure a satisfactory settlement by direct negotiation with Pakistan had failed, Government of India, as a last resort, had appealed to the Security Council in December 1947. Mere attempts to secure

settlement or referring the case to the Council of Nations without doing something positive to help the suffering people of Kashmir would have entailed sacrificing them at the altar of convenience. It would have been an act of cowardice and this would not have been compatible even with our fervent desire for peace. Hence the decision to send troops to Kashmir. Even Mahatma Gandhi, the great apostle of non-violence, had approved of this step. The decision to defend our helpless countrymen in Kashmir against this brutal invasion was therefore in no way contrary to our devotion to the ideals of peace or to our illustrious Ashokan heritage based on the ideal of "live and let live." We had recently emerged independent after a long era of eclipse but as one of the oldest nations of the world we were determined to maintain our unequalled and unique traditions of peace set by the great Ashoka. The foreigner who has been led away by false propaganda should view our intervention in Kashmir in the correct perspective.

After months of deliberations, the United Nations decided to send a commission to India and Pakistan so as to find an amicable solution for the Kashmir tangle. This commission arrived in India in early July 1948 and issued an appeal to both India and Pakistan to refrain from any offensive action in Kashmir that would prejudice negotiations for a settlement. India immediately responded to this appeal. As we have seen, after the battle of Pirkanthi and Ledigalli, we received orders to stop further offensive operations. Pakistan, on the other hand, paid scant heed to this appeal and continued with her offensive activities. Committed as we were to a defensive policy, Pakistan now found it convenient to gain the initiative from us. We shall presently see how Pakistan intensified her activities on all fronts after the arrival of the UNCIP (United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan) on the Indian sub-continent.

Pakistan had hitherto been denying her complicity in the invasion of Kashmir. She had been trying to convince the world that the trouble in Kashmir had arisen over India's intervention in favour of the Hindu Maharaja against the popular uprising of the local Muslim population

of that State. She argued that some Pathans and tribesmen had gone to Kashmir to rescue their co-religionists and she pleaded her inability to control the incursions of these tribesmen. Her inability to prevent her nationals from invading another country was indeed a strange and perhaps unique argument any government could put up in its defence. That these invaders had large bases in Pakistan, that they were armed with modern weapons of the Pakistan Army, that they had several "deserters" from the Pakistan Army and that there were also regular formations of the Pakistan Army fighting in this theatre, were facts which Pakistan conveniently glossed over. Therefore, we at the headquarters were collecting the mass of irrefutable evidence held by us of showing Pakistan's hand in the invasion. Captured documents, arms and equipment were all being carefully catalogued. Prisoners of Pakistan Army were being brought to Delhi to be presented before the UNCIP. Amongst these prisoners were two Muslim soldiers of 8th Punjab Regiment whom I had defended in a general court martial in Indonesia in 1946 against charges of desertion and waging war against the King. Though convicted, these soldiers were released by Pakistan when she gave amnesty to all prisoners after Independence. Thereafter these soldiers had joined an "Azad" Kashmir Battalion and were taken prisoners by us in a battle around Punch in early 1948. These prisoners readily admitted that regular units of Pakistan Army were fighting in Kashmir. Pakistan took the wind out of our sail by openly accepting for the first time, that she had sent her troops to Jammu and Kashmir to stem our summer offensive which she felt had threatened the security of Pakistan! We had not foreseen this volte-face and our attempts at cataloguing and collecting all the available evidence of her complicity were wasted. When the UNCIP visited our headquarters, Pakistan's complicity in these operations had already been accepted by them as a *fait accompli*.

About this time when we were briefing the members of the UNCIP in our operations room at the headquarters, the enemy opened his assault against Pandu in Uri sector. Two battalions of the enemy attacked 2 Bihar on 23rd July

supported by heavy concentrations of artillery. Due to inclement weather we could not send any reinforcements to the Biharis nor could we arrange any offensive air support to deal with the enemy. The Biharis were forced to withdraw from Pandu on the following day. The enemy had also moved up his medium guns in this sector and had started intermittent shelling with them. In Tithwal sector the enemy had similarly registered a local gain. He attacked a Madras piquet North of the Kishenganga on the 8th of July. This picquet was held by two platoons, approximately 60 men, and the enemy launched a battalion attack against it supported by heavy artillery concentration. Our platoons were forced to withdraw across the Kishenganga.

Skardu in the remote North, though besieged, had been successfully holding out for the past ten months. The enemy concentrated his resources in Gilgit against this small besieged garrison of a handful of State Force troops (approximately 200) who had escaped into the Fort before the onset of the last winter. This garrison was under the command of Colonel* Sher Jang Thapa of Kashmir State Forces. Some 300 non-Muslim refugees were also besieged with this garrison in the Fort. The enemy had laid a siege all round them for the past ten months. Any large scale operations to relieve this garrison during the winter in this "arctic" region was not possible. We were planning to despatch a strong relief column to Skardu after our summer offensive towards Domel. With the change in operational policy to a defensive role, at the request of the UNCIP in early July, the plan for this operation was now of academic interest. In August 1948 we found that the enemy's activities round Skardu had considerably increased. The garrison had suffered several casualties during the repeated enemy onslaughts of the past ten months which it had hitherto always successfully repulsed. The stocks of rations and ammunition inside the Fort had dangerously

*Later Brigadier.

fallen below the subsistence level. We could not arrange air supply for the garrison as Dakotas without pressurised cabins could not be flown at those forbidding heights, which air maintenance of Skardu entailed. We used our fighter aircraft on a few occasions to send up some urgently needed supplies but regular maintenance by Tempests was neither an economic nor a feasible proposition in view of our limited resources and our other commitments for our fighter aircraft. Moreover, the weather in these parts being so uncertain, it greatly hampered the possibility of regular air maintenance. The sending of a reinforcement column by land across 80 miles of very difficult terrain, entailing the forcing of several high Himalayan passes, required the launching of a major offensive operation which we had agreed not to undertake for the time being. The garrison had either to fight its way out from the Fort or to fight there to the last man last round. There was not much chance of the garrison fighting its way out though 80 miles of such difficult terrain dominated by the enemy. Further, in either case we could not prevent the massacre of the 300 refugees who had taken shelter at Skardu. The enemy commander in this sector knowing the plight of our garrison had sent a flamboyant message to Thapa which read something like this: "in the name of Allah, I demand thy surrender and I swear by the Holy Book that no harm would come to thee and thine if thou surrendereth." It was a difficult situation. Cariappa decided that Thapa must continue to hold out as long as possible but when resistance appeared impossible, he should surrender. And ultimately at 8 a.m. on the 14th of August this gallant garrison was forced to raise the white flag. The enemy was jubilant over his victory and we heard that the commander of the victorious Pakistan troops reported back to his headquarters: "All Sikhs shot, all women raped."

After the fall of Skardu, the enemy started moving into Ladakh in large numbers and was now threatening Leh, the capital of this Buddhist province, where the monks strictly practise the non-violent teachings of the Great Buddha. Enemy troops were reported at Nimu, only 8

miles from Leh and they had brought up their mountain guns in this area. We had only a small detachment of Gorkhas in Leh but they were cut off by the land route from Srinagar. The enemy had captured Kargil in May and there was now over 200 miles of enemy held territory between our troops at Zoji La and the garrison at Leh.

Further South in Jammu province, there had been a similar intensification of enemy activities. The besieged garrison of Punch was brought under fire of enemy 25-pounders in September 1948. The enemy had made the airfield unusable thereby cutting the only means of communication Punch had with the outside world.

It would thus be seen that Pakistan had not only not responded to the appeal issued by the UNCIP to refrain from offensive action, but she had also exploited the change in our operational policy. This change was not in any way due to any "Maginot line complex" developed by us of remaining inside our bunkers and refraining from any offensive action. This change had been made in response to the appeal of the UNCIP. Be that as it may, the initiative now passed to the enemy during these months. With no fear of any offensive by us he could now concentrate his forces against suitable objectives and develop his operations at will. Our troops fought back valiantly and except for Pandu, a hill feature near Tithwal and for Skardu Fort, we had not allowed the enemy to gain ground anywhere. However, the threat to our besieged garrisons at Leh and Punch had definitely increased. It was now imperative that we relieved these isolated positions so as to prevent the Skardu story being repeated in these places.

Although committed to a defensive policy, we at the headquarters had to be prepared for all eventualities and the General Staff at Western Command was examining plans for the following possible operations:

(a) DUCK (capture of Kargil with a view to link up with Leh. This would also eliminate the threat to the Jammu-Srinagar road from the East through Kishtwar.)
(b) EASY (Link up with Punch from Rajauri and thereby prevent enemy infiltration from this area to-

wards Riasi and on to the Jammu-Srinagar road from the West.)

(c) CAMEL (Capture of Hajipir Pass. This would liquidate the threat to Uri from the South as also afford a link-up with Punch.)

(d) SNOOK (Capture of Bhimber and thereby remove the threat to Naushera from the South.)

(e) STEEL (Capture of Kotli.)

(f) CRAB (Capture of Muzaffarabad.)

(g) BLOOD (Capture of Mirpur.)

The first three operations mentioned above, Duck, Easy and Camel were really in the nature of defensive operations as they meant relieving our besieged garrisons against whom the enemy had intensified his activities. They could therefore be mounted with the prior approval of the Government. The remaining four, Snook, Steel, Crab and Blood, could not be mounted as they were essentially offensive operations and as such contrary to our Government's declared policy.

The Government had decided that Leh and Punch must be held at all costs. Operations Duck and Easy would not only relieve these garrisons but would also remove the threat to the Jammu-Srinagar road both from the West and the East. We received approval to mount these operations. Our plans for the other operations were shelved for the time being and we put them in the safe custody of our steel cabinets to be referred to only if their need arose in the future.

All attention was to be concentrated on Duck and Easy. The former had to be given higher priority as speed was essential because with the approach of winter, all the passes would again get blocked with snow, suspending operations for six months.

A certain amount of reorganisation was also necessary prior to the launching of these two defensive operations. With his other commitments outside Jammu and Kashmir, the Army Commander felt that he could not devote as much time to these operations as he would have liked to. There was, therefore, a need for an overall com-

mander to co-ordinate operations in that theatre. Major General Srinagesh*, who was then Adjutant General, was promoted Lieutenant General and appointed Corps Commander for this theatre. Tactical Headquarters of Western Command at Jammu was wound up and in September 1948 we handed over to V Corps Headquarters. This was, however, a skeleton headquarters with minimum operational staff as it had no administrative responsibilities.

We now got down to preparing plans for the two defensive operations to link up with Leh and Punch. It was nice to shake off the virtual stalemate that had set in, during the previous two months. Fresh enthusiasm must have dawned on our besieged troops at Punch and Leh on hearing of these relief operations. To the remaining troops in the field it was also welcome news. With regular Pakistan Army formations now openly operating against us, we were keen that the enemy should feel the weight of our strength. These sentiments augured well for the success of these operations—and as we shall see, they also augured well for the restoration of peace in Kashmir.

*Later General and Chief of the Army Staff.

5

The Relief of Punch

SITUATED ON the confluence of the Batar and the Suran rivers, the town of Punch, surrounded by hills on all sides, has a very picturesque setting. The traveller by air who suddenly comes over this town after flying across endless hills, is struck by its prosperous look and its beautiful surroundings. As he approaches, he sees the famed Moti Mahal (Pearl Palace) of the Raja of Punch. It stands out prominently in the midst of other buildings of the town. Punch was the capital of this Raja who was a vassal of the Maharaja of Kashmir.

The two rivers, Batar and Suran, join to form the Punch river which flows South-West and ultimately merges with the Jhelum in Pakistan. This river goes through a valley along which lies the most accessible approach into Punch. In the past, therefore, most of the traffic into Punch used to be along this route from Jhelum and Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan. With the rest of Jammu and Kashmir, this town was connected only with difficult goat tracks. This accounted for the tactical isolation of Punch at the commencement of hostilities in this theatre. This isolation proved a great handicap for the defenders and it enabled the enemy to lay siege to the town for over a year. It required great courage and determination to defend this town despite heavy odds. Both these qualities, however, were amply found in Brigadier Pritam Singh, the Indian Commander at Punch and his gallant men. Punch could thus successfully hold out through those difficult months. Its

defence became an epic and we used to call it the Tobruk of Kashmir. However, unlike Tobruk, Punch never changed hands.

My association with Punch began very early in my army career when I was serving with the Jat Regiment in the pre-partition days. All the men of my company were Punchi Muslims and I remember that it was then one of my ambitions to visit the home town of my men. Little did I know then that I would one day go to Punch but under very different circumstances. After Partition, these men had gone to the Pakistan Army and we had had reports that many amongst them were now serving with the "Azad" Army against us. My old Subedar, Pahalvan Khan, was now commanding an "Azad" battalion !

When I visited Punch in 1948, I recalled with great relief how one of the proposals put up by me in 1945 had been turned down. While in Burma I had got officiating command of my company and had to write a monthly report on my men's morale and welfare. I consulted my second-in-command, Pahalwan Khan, and on his advice wrote a long note on the desirability of having an all-weather road from Rawalpindi to Punch. I had even worked out the number of bridges that would be required on this road and had suggested that we should subsidise a portion of the expenditure involved, from our regimental funds. I had put up this recommendation as my men going home on leave used to suffer great hardships as a result of poor road communications. My Commanding Officer, Colonel Newell, had a hearty laugh when he read my report and told me that every battalion of the Regiment had repeatedly put up for this road for the past 100 years but nothing had been done by the State authorities. And the fact that nothing had been done, now proved to be a blessing in disguise. If this road had then been built, it would have enabled the enemy to bring in more troops and heavier weapons against Punch, making its defence a far more difficult undertaking. Therefore, I now felt relieved at the thought that my Commanding Officer had not taken any notice of my recommendation!

When the raiders began their march into Kashmir in

October 1947 there were two State Force battalions located in this area. The remnants of these two battalions with some 40,000 refugees took shelter in Punch and were holding out against the enemy's attempts to annihilate them. It will be recalled that on the 22nd of November 1947, Pritam Singh had led his Kumaon battalion into Punch and reinforced the besieged garrison. He soon realised that it would be some time before the land route to Punch, either from Uri or from our positions in Jammu province in the South, could be opened. Six thousand refugees voluntarily provided the necessary labour for the construction of a landing ground. They feverishly worked day and night and within a week completed the construction of a dakota airstrip. The geographical isolation of Punch was broken and it was now linked by an aerial highway.

Apart from defending Punch we also took on ourselves the responsibility of sheltering the 40,000 refugees in the town and providing them with the necessities of life. Their feeding and welfare became our concern. There were occasions when the supply position was tight and our troops willingly agreed to share their rations with these refugees. Pritam Singh also raised, equipped and trained two militia battalions from amongst these refugees. They proved a valuable addition to our fighting manpower in Punch and they acquitted themselves creditably in subsequent operations. The enemy repeatedly attacked Punch but he was beaten in every engagement. However, to make our defences further secure, we decided to send another regular battalion to Punch by air. 3/9 Gorkha Rifles were accordingly airtransported to Punch in January 1948.

Being isolated by land, Punch could only be maintained by air. Our Air Force took on this responsibility and thus made the defence of Punch possible. Rations, ammunition, equipment and other stores for these troops as also for the refugees had to be flown daily from Jammu. The returning dakotas brought back refugees from the besieged town so as to ease the maintenance load. Several thousand refugees were flown out from Punch in those returning dakotas. Our young pilots engaged in this mission excelled

themselves. Flying to Punch was not an easy undertaking because of the hills all round the airfield. Enemy opposition had further increased the hazard involved. There had been occasions when our pilots had to run the gauntlet of enemy shelling on the airfield to land urgently needed stores. There had also been an occasion, when a young dakota pilot answered the call from the ground troops to pick up a serious casualty. At great risk to himself, he landed his dakota at Potha in a fantastically small bit of open ground for landing and picked up the casualty. The grim determination of these brave pilots, often personally led by their gallant commander, Air Commodore Meher Singh himself, enabled us to defend Punch.

In March the enemy brought up 3.7 howitzers against Punch. His intention appeared to be to make yet another bid to reduce the defences. He started heavy shelling of Punch with his mountain guns late in the evening of the 17th and fired over 200 shells inside our perimeter that night. The airstrip was naturally his main target. His shelling continued the following day doing considerable damage to the runway. Pritam Singh requested for some 25-pounder guns for counter-bombardment of enemy guns. A section of 25-pounders was flown in dakotas to Punch but this operation had to be called off when the first dakota got damaged due to enemy shelling while it taxied down the airstrip. It was considered too hazardous to attempt this landing by day and therefore a night operation was decided upon. The dakotas now personally led by Meher Singh came back over Punch again after dusk that day. In the hazy moonlight they landed their precious cargo. Their mission was successful. The following day, these 25-pounders were in action against the enemy guns. With their greater range and their heavier shell they compelled the enemy guns to withdraw, rendering the airstrip safe once again.

After our 25-pounders had made the enemy guns ineffective a temporary lull set in, the operations around Punch. This may also have been due to the fact that there was a popular uprising of the local Muslim population against the atrocities of the Pathans in enemy-held terri-

tory. And it were these Muslims, their co-religionists and "as such their co-nationals", whom the enemy had set out to liberate. This uprising, however, was put down with great severity by a Pakistan Army Brigadier.

During this lull in the summer of 1948 and when all attention was focussed on our offensive towards Domel, Atma Singh decided to effect a temporary link-up with Punch. As already mentioned, the two columns from Punch and Rajauri met almost half-way at Potha on 15th of June and thereafter retired to their respective firm bases. Due to paucity of troops we could not maintain this link permanently.

There were also several local operations carried out by the Punch brigade during this period. To supplement their meagre resources, troops were often sent out on grain collecting operations. This meant temporarily securing enemy held territory to permit our refugees to cut the crops and then return back to our perimeter at the end of the day. We had no desire to live off the country but these operations were forced upon us on account of the necessity for providing food for so many refugees in Punch. Moreover, in many cases these refugees had a moral right to these crops because it was their land which they had sown and which the enemy had taken over.

Towards the end of August, the enemy again intensified his activities against Punch. He put in a brigade attack against Tetrinot ridge, South of Punch. This attack was successfully beaten off. He, however, continued his concentrations around Punch. In September he brought up 25-pounder guns in this area and started shelling Punch again. The airstrip was again under enemy fire and was put out of commission, snapping the only link Punch had with the outside world. A few years later I met an old friend, Mohammad Nawaz of Pakistan Army, on a diplomatic assignment in Delhi. In 1946 Nawaz and I had been staff captains in the same headquarters in Indonesia and we had been good friends. He told me that he was officiating as a brigade commander at Punch in September 1948 and had had those 25-pounders man-handled to suitable positions from where they could shell the airfield. The Kashmir

war was queer in this respect as there were several cases of old friends fighting on either side. This, however, was inevitable for only a few months earlier we had all belonged to the same undivided Indian Army.

We could not allow the enemy to continue with his depredations around Punch indefinitely. The cutting off of the vital air link to Punch and the tightening of the enemy's ring round the besieged garrison called for immediate action. Our Government had already decided that Punch must be held at all costs and it had permitted us to effect a link-up by land with the garrison. It was, after all, primarily a defensive operation. The stage was now set for the relief of Punch.

For administrative reasons, it had been decided that the link-up with Punch would be effected from Rajauri in the South instead of from Uri in the north. Although the latter meant an advance of only 20 miles as against over 40 miles from Rajauri, it presented greater administrative difficulties. The link-up via Srinagar and Uri would have added an extra 200 miles to our line of communication from the rail-head at Pathankot to Punch. The Uri route also involved the crossing of two Himalayan passes—the Banihal and the Hajipir—which got blocked with snow during the winter. Therefore we chose the Rajauri axis for this link-up, despite it entailing a longer advance.

In September 1948, the enemy had three brigades deployed between Rajauri and Punch—3 Infantry Brigade at Jalan, 6 miles South of Punch, Tarzan Brigade at Mendhar and Raj Brigade opposite Rajauri. The latter brigade had sent two battalions East into Riasi and Budil area with a view to threatening the Jammu-Srinagar road from that direction. There were besides three other brigades in the area around Punch—two to its North and one to the West. These brigades, however, were not expected to materially affect our link-up operations from Rajauri as the enemy was not expected to withdraw them because of his other commitments and the threat posed by our troops deployed at Uri.

To effect a link-up with Punch against opposition by an enemy division through 40 miles of mountainous country

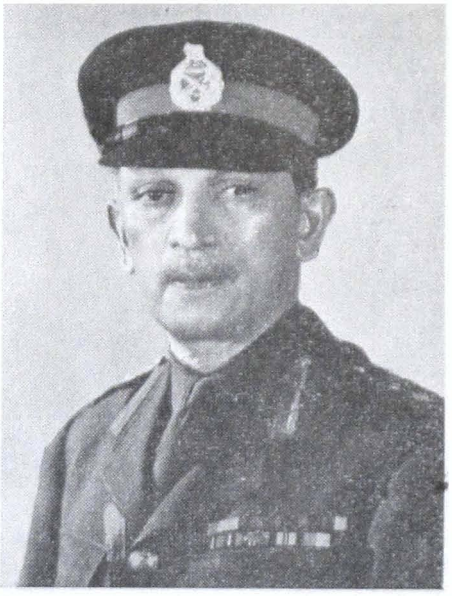
devoid of any roads, was not an easy undertaking. It required very careful and detailed planning including the concentration of a large force to effect the link-up. We planned on the main thrust from Rajauri to be undertaken by two brigades with another ad hoc brigade to support the flank of the advance. As troops operating beyond Rajauri would have to be dependent entirely on animal transport we also had to arrange for the concentration of some 900 mules at Rajauri prior to this operation. There was, besides, also a need for constructing a road behind our advancing troops so as to facilitate their maintenance and ensure the move forward of field artillery to support their advance. This meant the concentration of necessary engineer resources and labour at Rajauri. To make the complexities of the problem appear psychologically not so difficult, code name "Easy" was given to this operation.

It was reckoned that it would take about a month to launch Operation Easy. This would allow sufficient time for the concentration of the required resources at Rajauri. Cariappa, however, was keen to take on some offensive mission quickly. He directed Atma Singh to undertake an operation North of Rajauri with a limited aim. Thanamandi, lying about 10 miles north of Rajauri, was the objective for this operation. It was our intention to drive a wedge between the enemy main force and his two battalions now operating to the East in Riasi and Budil area, threatening the Jammu-Srinagar road. The task of the capture of Thanamandi was given to Yadunath Singh. This operation was kept a closely guarded secret. Except for the Army Commander and of course the Division and Brigade Commanders and a couple of selected staff officers, no one knew anything about this proposed operation. Even Army Headquarters were not in the picture about this operation during the planning stage, a fact which they did not particularly appreciate when they heard about it later. We concentrated two battalions (2 Rajputana Rifles and 1 Kumaon Rifles) together with some light tanks and a battery of mountain guns at Rajauri. The operation commenced with a deception. We pretended to go for Sadabad in the south and then quietly moved north on

the night of 20th/21st. The infantry advanced six miles along the hills right of the main road and secured a hill feature, Point 6454, during the night. The following morning, Yadunath Singh demonstrated along the main track with light tanks and some infantry so as to deceive the enemy to think that we intended to advance along this track. On the next day, the infantry again advanced along the hills right of the track and secured Point 7710, the highest hill feature in the vicinity. The feature was held by two enemy companies supported by 3-inch mortars but the enemy was forced to abandon his position and flee towards the north. A hailstorm and a thick mist had proved providential for us as they provided a natural smoke screen for our assault on this feature. Our casualties in this operation—only 3 killed—were indeed negligible against enemy's 42 counted killed. With Point 7710 in our hands, the enemy defences around Thanamandi had become untenable and on the same day, that is, 22nd September, we entered this township. Two enemy battalions in Riasi-Budil area were in the bag. These battalions were operating in small parties and we now proceeded to liquidate them in this pocket.

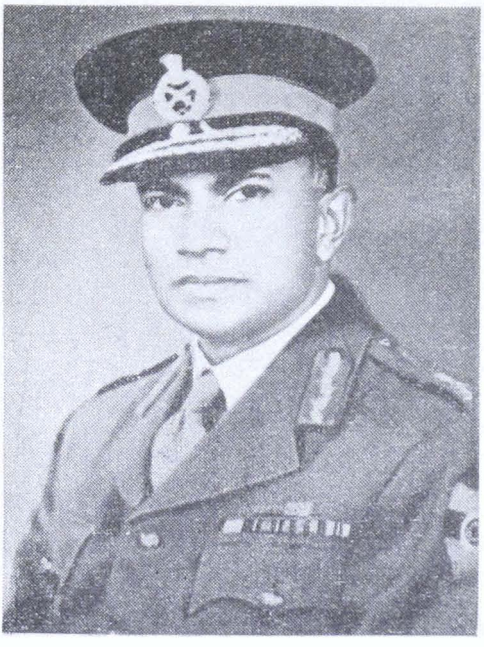
After the successful completion of the Thanamandi operation we had to wait for nearly a month for launching Operation Easy. Apart from the concentration of an additional brigade at Rajauri, we also had to secure our vulnerable line of communication in this area. Our 150 miles long axis of maintenance to Rajauri via Naushera ran parallel to the border from Pathankot to Naushera and was vulnerable throughout its length. To make it secure, we planned to position two more battalions in this sector. For protecting the portion of this road between Naushera and Rajauri from its vulnerable western flank, a preliminary operation was necessary. Pir Badesar, a dominating hill feature in this area, had to be captured. With this feature in our hands the threat from the West would be countered. The capture of Pir Badesar was, therefore, the first phase of Operation Easy.

The link-up with Punch was planned in six phases :



Left: Lt.-Gen. Sir Dudley Russell, KBE, CB, DSO, MC, GOC-in-C Delhi & East Punjab Command, later redesignated as Western Command. *Right:* Gen. K. M. Cariappa, GOC-in-C Western Command (Jan 48 to Jan 49)

Left: Lt.-Gen. S.M. Shrinagesh, GOC V Corps (Sept 48 to Jan 49)
Right : Maj.-Gen. Kalwant Singh, GOC JAK Force (Nov 47 to May 48)

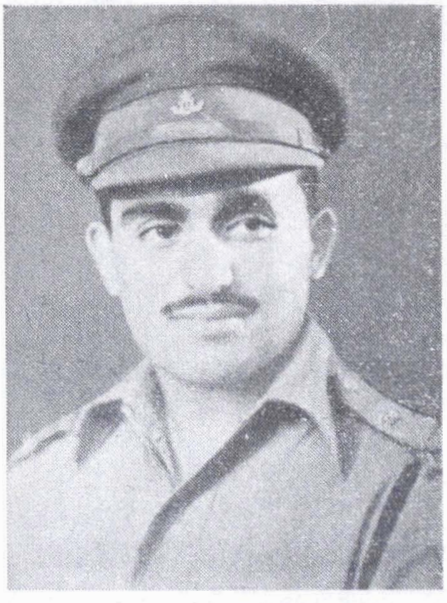


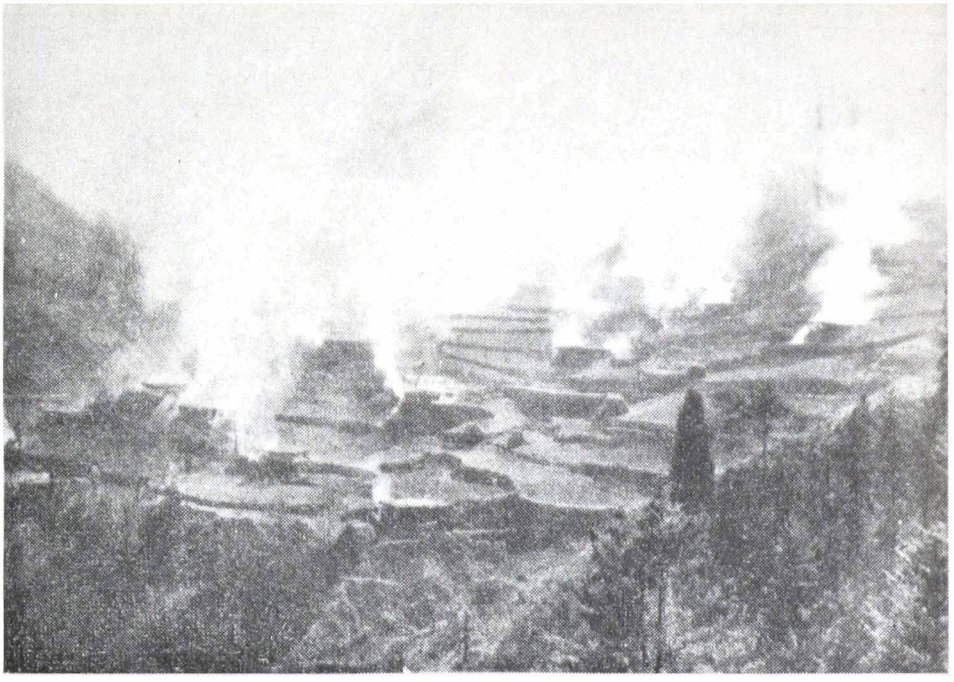
Left: Maj.-Gen. K. S. Thimayya, DSO, GOC 19 Infantry Division during 1948-49 operations in the Srinagar Valley. *Right:* Maj.-Gen. Atma Singh, GOC 26 Infantry Division during 1948-49 operations in Jammu.

Left: Air Commodore Mehar Singh, DSO. He was in command of the Air Force employed in Jammu and Kashmir. *Right :* Brig. L.P. Sen, DSO, Commander 161 Infantry Brigade which routed the enemy in the battle of Shalatang and advanced from Srinagar to Uri

Left: Brig. Mohammed Usman, Commander 50 Para Brigade. He inflicted a crushing defeat on the enemy in the battle of Naushera and was killed during the shelling of Jhangar in July 1948. *Right:* Brig. K.L. Atal, Commander 77 Para Brigade. He led the troops engaged in the battle of Zoji La.

Left: Maj. Som Nath Sharma of 4 Kumaon who was killed in action at Badgom in Nov 1947. He was posthumously awarded Param Vir Chakra. *Right:* Lt.-Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai, OC 1 Sikh. He was killed in October 1947 while withdrawing from Baramula. He was posthumously awarded Maha Vir Chakra.





A view of Baramula after it had been set ablaze by the invaders.

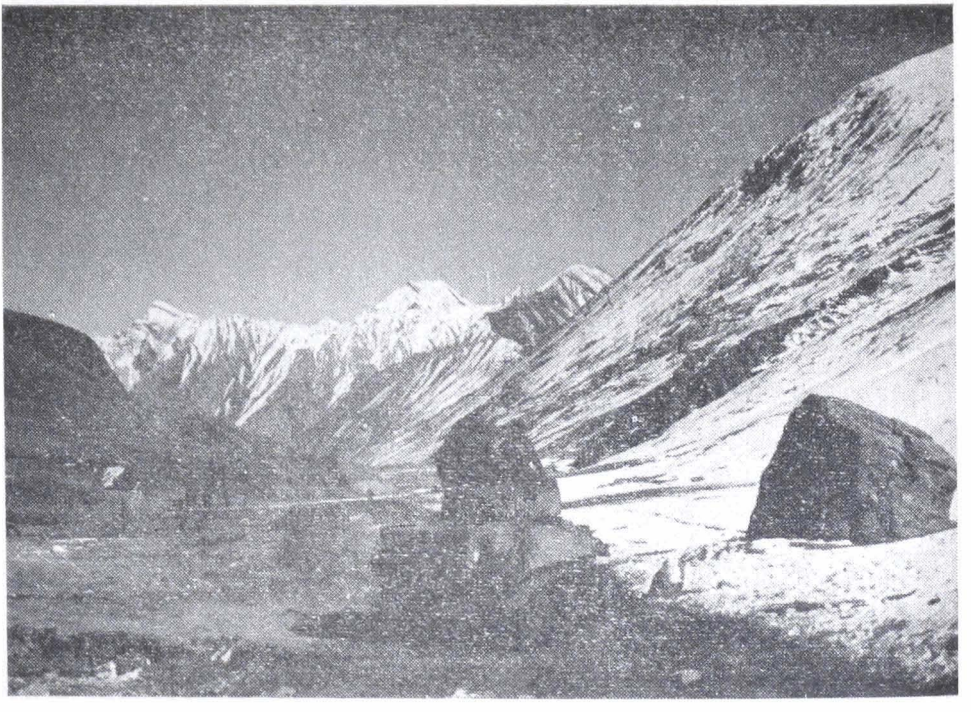
Troops landing on fairweather airfield at Srinagar and setting out in a civilian bus.

Brig. Harbaksh Singh, Vr.C. Commander 163 Infantry Brigade with his brigade staff. The officer on his right is the Brigade Major, Maj. Z. C. Bakshi, Vr.C. (now Lt.-Gen. Z. C. Bakshi, PVSM, MVC, Vr.C., VSM)

A patrol on a snow-covered hill slope.

A 25-pounder gun in action at Zoji La

A Stuart Tank on its way to Zoji La

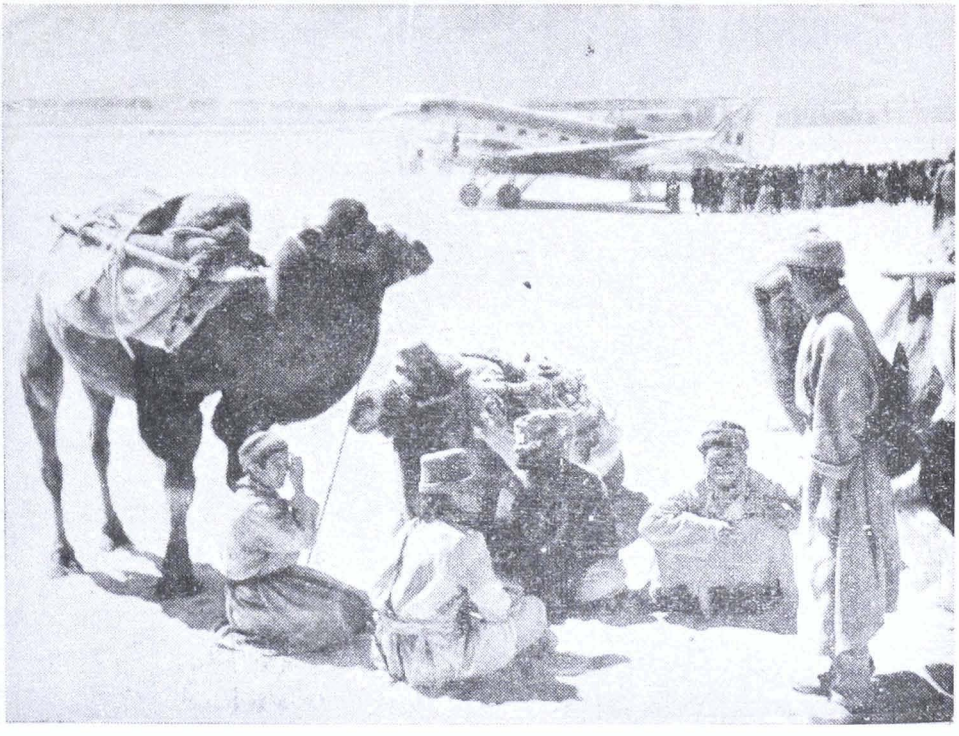


Left to Right—Maj.-Gen. K. S. Thimayya, DSO, GOC 19 Infantry Division, Lt.-Gen. S.M. Shrinagesh, GOC V Corps, and Lt.-Gen. K. M. Cariappa, GOC-in-C Western Command during operations at Zoji La.

A Gorkha signalman at Zoji La.

A Gorkha examining a captured 3-inch mortar at Zoji La

The first aeroplane to land at Leh, the then highest airfield in the world.



(a) Phase 1—Capture of Pir Badesar.
(b) Phase 2—Concentration of troops at Rajauri.
(c) Phase 3—Capture of Pir Kalewa.
(d) Phase 4—Capture of Sangiot.
(e) Phase 5—Break-out from Sangiot and the link-up with Punch.
(f) Phase 6—Reorganisation including construction of a jeep track to Punch.

Pir Badesar is a 5430 feet high feature, North-West of Jhangar and overlooks the Seri Valley through which passes the route to Kotli. It also over looks the Naushera Valley to its East in the area of Chingas. By the middle of October we had had reports of an enemy brigade being brought up towards Pir Badesar with a view to cutting off our line of communication at Chingas. Our operations towards Pir Badesar eliminated this threat and upset the plans of this brigade, which had been given the name of Bijli Force. Brigadier Harbhajan Singh, commanding 268 Infantry Brigade at Jhangar, launched the operation for the capture of Pir Badesar on the night of 14th/15th October with two battalions. He secured his objective by the following afternoon. Brigadier Dubey*, who had a few months earlier taken over as our Brigadier General Staff from Brigadier Wadalia now in England, was at Jhangar to see the start of this operation. On return to the headquarters he gave us a very graphic account of the operation. Our troops had advanced 14 miles in 24 hours along a difficult mountainous track against enemy opposition. When dawn broke they were at the foot, of Pir Badesar and the Tempests flew over to give necessary fire support for the assault. The enemy suffered 102 killed in this operation and also lost nine prisoners besides arms and equipment which he was forced to abandon.

We had undertaken the Pir Badesar operation primarily to protect the western flank of the road from Naushera to Rajauri. In the event, it also turned out to be an excellent deception. From intercepts of enemy wireless messages it

* Later Major General.

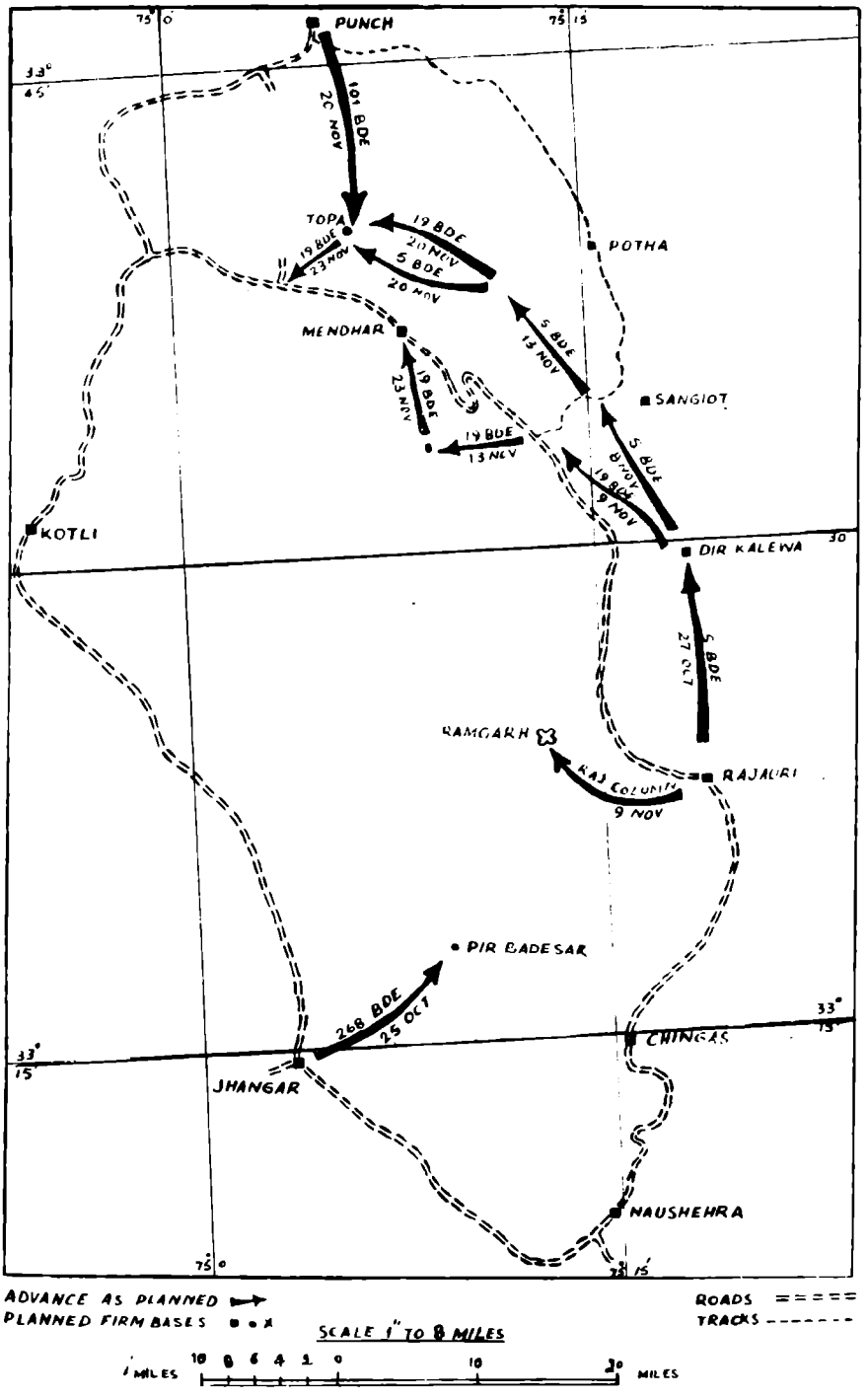
appeared that the enemy anticipated an advance by us from Jhangar to Kotli. This offered tempting possibilities for deception and Cariappa decided to exploit the situation. It was decided to modify the subsequent phases of the link-up operation. We were now to advance to Punch via Mendhar instead of via Sangiot. An advance towards Mendhar being in the direction of Kotli would force the enemy to commit his resources around Kotli and thus facilitate our link-up with Punch in the North. This change in plan also suited the engineers for they found that the construction of a jeep track via Mendhar would be an easier proposition than via Sangiot.

While we were proceeding with the concentration of our force at Rajauri, the second phase of Operation Easy, the enemy had been very active all along the front between Pathankot and Naushera. There had been several sharp encounters indicating that the enemy was concentrating his resources in this sector to divert our attention from our offensive towards the north. We had, however, already catered for this and two battalions (1 Marathas and 6 Jat) were on the move from Hyderabad to further secure this sector. In the meanwhile, we proceeded with the third phase of Operation Easy which was the capture of Pir Kalewa, a commanding feature on the Rajauri-Thanamandi road. 5 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Umrao Singh,* which had recently arrived in Rajauri, successfully secured this feature on the 26th without much opposition.

Perhaps aware of our concentrations and of our offensive intentions, the enemy made a bold bid in area Chhamb to divert our attention. He attacked our positions on the 29th of October but failed to gain any success. He later opened heavy artillery fire with his 25-pounders and medium guns firing over 300 shells in the forward company localities of the Marathas who had only a few hours earlier arrived in this sector from Hyderabad. We were determined not to allow this diversion to interfere with our well-laid plans for the relief of Punch. This sector was reinforced by a squadron of medium tanks of

* Later Lieutenant General.

THE LINK-UP WITH PUNCH



the Deccan Horse, which was moved post haste from Jammu across the Chenab to Chhamb. The crossing of the Chenab river had to be carried out over rafts as the bridge would not take the load of Sherman tanks. There was an unfortunate incident during this crossing when one of the tanks slipped from the raft into the fast flowing river and most of the men on the raft including the crew got drowned. We had to request the Navy to send us divers to help in locating the tank and salvaging it. Two divers were sent up from Bombay and they ultimately succeeded in locating the missing tank which was later recovered. By their presence, these divers provided the third dimension for these operations. Hitherto only the Army and the Air Force had operated in this theatre. Now the Navy was also represented. I believe these two divers are the only personnel of our Navy entitled to wear the General Service Medal with the Kashmir clasp.

By the 5th of November, we had completed our concentration at Rajauri. The troops concentrated for this operation were approximately a complete infantry division and were under command of Yadunath Singh.
These units were as follows :

(a) 5 Infantry Brigade : Brigadier Umrao Singh*
4 Madras Regiment
5 Rajputana Rifles
1/4 Gorkha Rifles

(b) 19 Infantry Brigade : Lt Col Jagjit Singh
1/2 Punjab Regiment
2 Rajputana Rifles
1 Kumaon Regiment

(c) Rajauri Column : Lt Col Ajit Singh Sodhi†
2/2 Punjab Regiment
3 Assam Regiment
6/8 Gorkha Rifles

* Later Lieutenant General.
† Later Brigadier.

(d) Armour and artillery

Two troops Central India Horse (Light tanks)
16 Field Regiment less one battery
One battery 13 Field Regiment
One battery 22 Mountain Regiment

On the night of 6th/7th November, we commenced our advance from Rajauri. 19 Brigade advanced along the left and 5 Brigade on the right, both securing a succession of hill features. The capture of the left and right shoulders of Bhimber Gali were the tasks given to these two brigades. By the evening of 8th November the two brigades secured their respective objectives covering a distance of over 18 miles through the hills. As they approached near Bhimber Gali, enemy resistance stiffened but they pressed their advance successfully, sometimes even without artillery support as they had outstripped the range of their guns. The engineers were feverishly building a jeep track behind these leading brigades to permit guns to move forward to support these attacks. Machine-guns and mortars had of course to be man-handled from one position to another.

On the following day, the Rajauri column also set out and captured Ramgarh Fort, five miles north-west of Rajauri securing the left flank of the main force at Bhimber Gali. This fort is on top of a steep pine-clad projection and its history dates back to the Mughal days. "Brigadier" Rahmatullah (a State Force deserter) was in command of the enemy's troops in this area but he soon gave up the fight and withdrew. By mid-day of the 9th we captured the fort and ceremonially hoisted the Indian tricolour on its flag mast. The enemy had fled in small parties after suffering heavy casualties and leaving a big dump inside the fort. On the same day, 19 Brigade from Bhimber Gali secured a feature, Point 6207. This feature gave a panoramic view of enemy concentrations at Turti about six miles south of Mendhar. There were about 1000 enemy with mules concentrated in the open space at Turti and they provided the ideal dream target for our gunners. The havoc caused by our shelling was immense and the

enemy fled in panic leaving behind a very large number of his dead in that area.

The initial success of Operation Easy augured well for the future. We had already dealt a damaging blow to the enemy around Rajauri and we were now confidently looking forward to the success of our subsequent phases. About this time, Umrao Singh, commanding 5 Infantry Brigade, was wounded and was relieved by Yadunath Singh. Atma Singh now personally took over command of this force and was determined to proceed further with all possible speed. We had also received reports of the enemy intending to bring up his medium tanks against isolated Punch and our air reconnaissance had confirmed that he had developed the Hajira track to Punch for this purpose. This made speed imperative for our further advance.

The advance continued beyond Bhimber Gali towards Mendhar on a two brigade front with 19 Brigade on the left and 5 Brigade on the right. Our deception by changing the axis of our advance from Sangiot to Mendhar and also our demonstrations towards the North from Pir Badesar, appear to have fully convinced the enemy of our intention to advance to Kotli. 19 Brigade advancing on the left encountered heavy opposition and were held up against a feature, Point 5372, held in strength by the enemy. The approach to this feature was extremely difficult. This feature appeared to be closely linked by fire with other enemy positions round Mendhar and a frontal assault was the only feasible approach to it. It was appreciated that a frontal assault against this formidable feature would inevitably mean heavy casualties. At this stage we again decided to exploit possibilities for another deception. We switched 19 Infantry Brigade less one battalion from the left to the right reinforcing 5 Infantry Brigade which had so far reported weak enemy opposition. This was a bold move and involved the switch over of forces across hills through difficult country but it obviously had great potentialities. To keep the enemy unaware of this move, one battalion of 19 Infantry Brigade continued to demonstrate against Point 5372 and dummy air drops were arranged behind its positions. On the 18th of November,

the two brigades concentrated on the right sector turned North and advanced towards Punch. By the 20th, these brigades captured Point 5982 and Topa ridge a few miles south of Punch. Pritam Singh advanced south from Punch and joined up with this relief column at 2 p.m. on the 20th of November.

The enemy had been taken completely by surprise during the final phase of the link-up and a considerable amount of booty fell in our hands. It was a great day for the defenders of Punch as their year's isolation had been successfully broken and the siege had been lifted. After effecting this link-up Atma Singh sent 19 Infantry Brigade to the South again, to take on Mendhar defences from the rear. The morale of the enemy had been broken and he was now in no mood to put up stiff opposition. Mendhar was captured on the 23rd of November. In the meanwhile, our jeep track under construction by engineers had reached beyond Bhimber Gali and soon Punch was linked by road via Mendhar.

Thus ended Operation Easy as a resounding success for our troops. We had deceived the enemy and broken the hard core of the resistance put up by his division in this area. During this operation the enemy suffered 363 killed and 633 wounded and besides lost large quantities of arms including mortars and machine-guns and a number of prisoners. 800 square miles of enemy held territory was liberated and the locals including 10,000 Muslims eagerly came forward to us for resettlement. This large number of Muslims coming to us for shelter unhinged the enemy's propaganda fanning religious fanaticism.

From the tactical point of view, however, the most important result of this operation was that the isolation of Punch was broken. No longer would the defenders be required to spend anxious days and sleepless nights with the enemy all round them menacing their life-line, the airfield. On the maps in our Operation Room we rubbed the blue marks all round Punch and showed a continuous red line from Rajauri to Punch.*

* In those days we still used red to indicate own troops and blue to show the enemy's forces.

6

Across Zoji La

BEYOND THE 11,578 feet high Zoji La (La means a pass) lies the semi-arctic and barren, Ladakh district. The average height of this area is over 10,000 feet. Apart from its geographical and climatic isolation this region appeared unaffected by the sands of time. It was as if time had stood still in these parts for many centuries. Ladakh is a land of the Lamas. Politically it is a part of Jammu and Kashmir State and its administration is controlled from Srinagar.

Surrounded by 20,000 feet high mountains, Leh which is itself at a height of 11,500 feet, is the capital of Ladakh. It is the largest town of the district and for that matter one of the largest towns in the world at that height. Tucked away in its Himalayan isolation, beyond high mountain ranges, Leh had not been very accessible to the outside world. It is approximately 230 miles East of Srinagar and only the first 40 miles of this route was then motorable. The other route into Leh is via the roadhead at Manali in Himachal Pradesh and this is a 200 miles long mule track across high mountain passes.* The events of 1948 broke the geographical isolation of Leh. With its newly built landing ground, it now appeared on the air map of India and this fact has since been the principal promoter of Leh's closer association with the outside world. However, in May 1948, when the first dakota landed at Leh, the locals

* A motorable road has now been built broadly following this alignment. Thus Leh is now connected by roads both from the West and the South.

turned up at the airfield with grass for "the celestial horse"!

I knew that conditions prevailing in Leh were very different from the rest of Kashmir and I had heard interesting stories of life in these parts. My curiosity to explore Leh for myself had been roused and I heartily welcomed the opportunity when I was told that I had to go to that "remote front". Flying to Leh over those snow-clad mountains is always an interesting experience, though at times it is a trifle uncomfortable. One has to almost constantly fly at a height of over 20,000 feet and there are several air pockets in the atmosphere at that altitude. Moreover, Dakotas which were the only transport aircraft we then had, were not ideally suited for such high altitude flying. I was in the cockpit of the plane with the pilot when I saw a formidable peak from a distance. The pilot pointed out that it was the famous K2. Perched at a height of 28,250 feet, K2 dominates all the surrounding mountains and is the second highest peak in the world. According to local custom we invoked the blessings of the spirits that reside on these passes and high peaks, by dutifully bowing to K2 but apparently the spirits residing on K 2 were not too pleased with us. Soon the peak was covered by a cloud and we were given a nasty jolt by a big air pocket.

I got out of the Dakota, while the plane kept its engine running lest it had starting difficulty at that altitude. We had landed at the then highest airfield in the world. It had only recently been constructed by us on a gentle gradient. There appeared no signs of life at the airfield except for the nearby Indus which, being close to its source, is in its infancy. Here it is only a narrow fast-flowing stream with crystal-clear water. There was a gompa (monastery) on a hill-top near the airfield, but besides this gompa I could see no other evidence of habitation anywhere. I, for a moment wondered whether we had lost our bearings. Soon, however, the patch of clouds covering the town of Leh disappeared and I could now see Leh rising on a hillside with snow-covered ridges on the top providing an idyllic background. Leh looks like a miniature Lhasa

from a distance. The several storeyed Raja's palace with its hundred or more rooms built centuries ago is a marvel of the engineering skill of the modern Ladakhi's fore-fathers.

A jeep had now arrived at the landing ground to fetch me. Being an infantryman used to marching on my feet, I felt very important at being privileged to travel in the one and only motor vehicle in Ladakh. This jeep had been flown by us to Leh and was used for local duties around the town. Travelling in that jeep that morning, I wondered why man should fight battles in such peaceful surroundings. But human beings would not spare even the land of Lamas and Ladakh had seen many battles in the past. The historian would tell us that when we went into Ladakh in 1948, it was the third time in recorded history that the Indian Army had entered these remote parts. The first occasion was in the seventeenth century when Emperor Shah Jahan had sent a force to help the Raja of Leh against an attack from the North. The Raja had thereafter regularly paid tribute to the Mughal Emperor. The second occasion was in the last century when Zorawar Singh, a famous general of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir, had annexed this district. The fort built by Zorawar Singh at Leh and the guns at its entrance remind the visitor of his remarkable campaigns fought over a 100 years ago. And now we in 1948 had provided the third occasion. But we had come on a different mission. To put it in the words of a Lama whom I met that day, "The Indian Army has come to Leh to protect our 'chortens' (ashes of our fathers) and our 'gompas' (the temples of our God). May the blessings of the Buddha rest on them." I wondered if the Lama had studied Macaulay.

While at Leh I took the opportunity of visiting a gompa. It was awe-inspiring to see a hundred Lamas turning the prayer wheel and quietly chanting their sacred hymns in that incensed hall. There were innumerable statues of the Great Buddha in the monastery. Coming as I do from the land of Buddha, I felt a sense of parochial pride at his being held in such great reverence even in these inaccessible regions. It was, however, interesting to find that the Lamas

had also hung the pictures of Mahatma Gandhi and General Cariappa on the monastery wall. One could understand Mahatma Gandhi's picture being hung in such sacred and non-violent surroundings but I must say I was amused to see my Army Commander's picture also in this monastery. Later, I was told that the General's picture symbolised the Indian Army which had come to Ladakh, to "rescue the religion of the Lamas".

The Chief Lama of the monastery took a kindly interest in my intrusion. He even gave me "prashad" which consisted of 'perhas' and Tibetan tea. I am afraid the latter, with Yak's milk, butter and salt, made me terribly sick. I, however, controlled my feelings, and gulped the tea for it would have been bad manners not to drink it. As for the 'perhas', the chief Lama told me that years ago he had brought them from Gaya when he had gone there on pilgrimage. This had special interest for me as Gaya is very near my home and is the place of my birth. Despite the lapse of years, the 'perha' was still very tasty. I remembered how as a child I had worried my grandmother by quietly eating a large number of Gaya 'perhas' while I was running high temperature. I am told I was down with remittent fever for several weeks after this escapade. I wondered whether eating the several years old 'perha' would now give me any such fever again but the semi-arctic conditions of Leh provide a natural frigidaire for preserving food. The Lama asked me, "How long more is this trouble going to last?" I assured him that it would all be over soon. He then inquired whether the plane service would stop afterwards and on my tellng him that the air service to Leh had perhaps now come to stay, he did not feel too happy. But he was not the only person I met that day who was not too enthusiastic about the air service. I also met an old European lady of a Christian mission who had stayed in Leh for the last 30 or more years. She complained that in the old days she got the London Times after five to six months but now-a-days she was receiving it within 4 to 5 days of its publication in London. She did not seem frightfully interested in being up-to-date with news but she did appear to resent the letters she was

now receiving from certain enthusiastic ornithologists in England who were wanting her to send them bird's eggs from these Himalayan heights. Apparently they had read an account that had appeared in the papers of the pioneering work done in this area by her.

Anyway, during my short stay in Leh, I found traces of contact with the outside world gradually appearing in the lives of the common people in this remote region. I was very amused to hear young Ladakhi boys merrily singing a popular film song in the street, "Meri jan, meri jan, Sunday ke Sunday ana." Apparently they had picked up this song from our troops stationed in Leh without having any idea of what the words meant. I also saw Lamas in their flowing red robes playing volleyball in the town square! It presented a queer mixture of the ancient past with the modern present.

As I got into my plane for the return journey to Srinagar I bade "Jule Jule" (Ladakhi for good-bye) to Leh. I, however, returned determined to visit this interesting place again and learn more about its people, when peace was restored in this area.* For the present, there were much bigger things at stake to permit of such pleasure trips and, as it was, the fate of Leh itself hung in the balance.

When operations commenced in the Kashmir Valley, there was a platoon of the State Force stationed in Leh. The enemy's activities in Gilgit had presented a potential threat to the security of Ladakh and volunteers from the local populace came forward to fight for the defence of their homes. We enlisted them in a militia battalion that was raised in Leh. Notable amongst these volunteers was the Raja of Leh who enlisted as a Sepoy. After some time this young Raja was commissioned as a Lieutenant. He comes from one of the oldest ruling dynasties of the world and claims to be a direct descendent of the founder of his dynasty who ruled in the ninth century

* This desire was fulfilled some twenty years later when I commanded a battalion in these parts for over two years.

A.D. The Raja was one of the several volunteers who was enthusiastically helping us in our bid to defend Leh. Once, when one of our picquets had run out of ammunition and replenishment seemed difficult, a young boy of 12 came to the picquet's rescue. He volunteered to bring ammunition from the base even though it entailed going right under the nose of an enemy picquet at a distance of only 400 yards. This boy brought some ammunition in a blanket going past the enemy post, whistling and throwing pebbles giving the impression of being an urchin wandering aimlessly near his village.

The monasteries of Leh were well-known for their wealth and we had feared that that would attract the enemy's lust for loot. In February 1948 we had sent Prithi Chand and a small band of volunteers in a hazardous trek across Zoji La in the winter covering over 200 miles to Leh. They defied the elements and despite all the hardships inherent in winter operations at altitudes above 10,000 feet, they got into Leh to organise the defence of the town. They were the first Indian Army troops to arrive in Leh during these operations and they formed the nucleus around which we gradually built our strength at this outpost to deal with the enemy threat as it developed.

As suggested by the military correspondent of the Pakistan Times, the enemy started threatening this area in the summer of 1948 as a counter to our offensive from Uri towards Domel. Thimayya had already positioned 1 Patiala at Sonamarg prior to launching his summer offensive. The Patialas effectively dealt with enemy infiltrations towards Srinagar and soon established themselves on the western approaches of Zoji La rendering the Srinagar Valley secure from the East. We could not undertake any operations beyond Zoji La as our resources did not at that time permit us to undertake such a venture when we were heavily committed in other sectors. The enemy took advantage of this situation and captured Kargil in May which was then held by a small State Force garrison. The remnants of this garrison fell back to Leh.

Kargil is an important communication centre half way between Srinagar and Leh. It also lies on the route from

Gilgit in the north to Leh. We realised that the best way to ensure the security of Leh was to capture Kargil and cut off the rear of the enemy operating against us in Ladakh. But this was an operation which we could not undertake for some time. We, therefore, decided to reinforce Leh for the time being, to enable it to hold out till such time as we were ready to launch our operation for Kargil. The obvious choice for these reinforcements fell on the Gorkhas as they come from the Himalayan regions of Nepal and as such would be better suited to stand the rigours of Ladakh climate.

Fortunately for us, our troops at Leh managed to construct an airstrip with the help of a local engineer. Mehar Singh and Thimayya landed at this airstrip on "the roof of the world", on the 23rd of May. Theirs was the first plane in Leh and their flight over an unchartered route had been a hazardous undertaking. Mehar Singh who was piloting the plane was known enthusiastically to take on such difficult tasks and as for Thimayya, he was in his elements in any enterprise that involved risks. Two companies of Gorkhas, one each of 2/4 Gorkha Rifles and 2/8 Gorkha Rifles were now flown to Leh in May/June. Their flight had to be spread over a long period as in these regions aircraft are greatly dependent on weather conditions. Moreover, at that time we had only one oxygen fitted Dakota which could undertake flights to Leh. Allowing for maintenance and for the weather, this dakota could not do more than three sorties a week. However, these reinforcements arrived in time. Soon after their arrival the enemy made a bid to capture Leh. He attacked one of our forward picquets with a battalion supported by 3.7 howitzers. He had only recently brought his mountain artillery in this area. This attack was easily repulsed. Later, one of our long range patrols led by Prithi Chand penetrated deep into the enemy's positions and captured one of the enemy's howitzers. This patrol could not bring back the gun with it and therefore decided to destroy it.

After the fall of Skardu on the 14th of August, the enemy further intensified his operations against Leh. He was now operating in Nimu about 8 miles west of Leh. It

was reported that he was sending further reinforcements and we therefore decided to strengthen our garrison of two companies at Leh. One more company of 2/8 Gorkha Rifles was flown from Srinagar and the battalion less two companies moved up by the land route from Manali. Our limited aircraft resources did not allow us to send more than one company from Srinagar and still cope with the maintenance lift for Leh. We therefore had to send the battalion less two companies by the land route.

The Gorkhas marching from Manali in late August must have had an interesting 200 miles trek through these mountains. Their route went over five passes above 12,000 feet, the highest of them being the 16,000 feet Baralacha La. It had been planned to send six months' stocks with them. This meant a load of 4700 ponies. The administrative staff rightly pointed out that it would require considerable time to concentrate such a large number of animals at Manali. We on the General Staff pressed for the early despatch of these reinforcements on account of the worsening tactical situation around Leh. A compromise was ultimately struck whereby this column, which had been given the code name Arjun, took only 30 days' supplies and 800 rifles for the local militia.

Although by August we had three oxygen-fitted Dakotas at Srinagar, they could not cater both for daily maintenance and the building up of stocks for the winter. The latter required a lift of over 300 sorties. We had, therefore, planned to send the remaining supplies through Zoji La but this involved a major operation to break through this pass which was then held in strength by the enemy. In the event, as we shall presently see, our plans to break through Zoji La in September proved abortive. There was, therefore, again the need for the despatch of another column with supplies. It had been planned to send the remaining 150 days' stocks before the winter set in, by opening the Zoji La route in September. Brigadier Sarda Nand Singh,* who had been our Brigadier Administration from the very early days of these operations, and his pains-

* Later Major General.

taking administrative staff had to do some hectic planning to despatch a second column with supplies from Manali. This column was given the code name Chapati. With the Baralacha La threatening to be completely snow-bound by 7th October, Chapati column had to be despatched almost immediately to ensure that the porters were across the Pass towards their home in Manali before that date. The administrative staff excelled themselves in improvisation and speed. They despatched Chapati column from Manali on the 12th of September with 400 mules and 1000 porters, all carrying supplies. This column was met half way by another column of mules and porters sent from Leh. Loads were transferred enabling both the columns to get back to their respective bases before the Baralacha La was closed for the winter.

We all had great admiration for our administrative staff for so successfully tackling the maintenance problem of Leh. They had an extremely difficult task throughout these operations, which were a logistical nightmare. The undeveloped state of communications in this theatre, together with our limited resources for air supply as also isolated positions like Punch, Leh and Skardu, had stretched our slender administrative resources to the farthest limit. We were, however, fortunate in having Brigadier Sarda Nand at the head of our administrative staff with a long 'Q' background and a flair for administration. Later, I had the privilege to serve as his brigade major in a frontier brigade and found that watching him tackle both tactical and administrative problems that came up before our brigade was a great education. I am sure he will forgive me if I mention an amusing incident connected with one of the junior members of his staff. This officer was so engrossed in keeping maintenance figures at various places that he had not kept himself up-to-date with tactical developments.

A couple of weeks after the fall of Skardu, he got up at a conference to complain that he had not received stocking figures from the Skardu garrison and that he would send them a reminder! I mention this incident not because it then provoked great laughter but because I feel

it brings out the need for the administrative staff at all levels always keeping abreast of tactical developments.

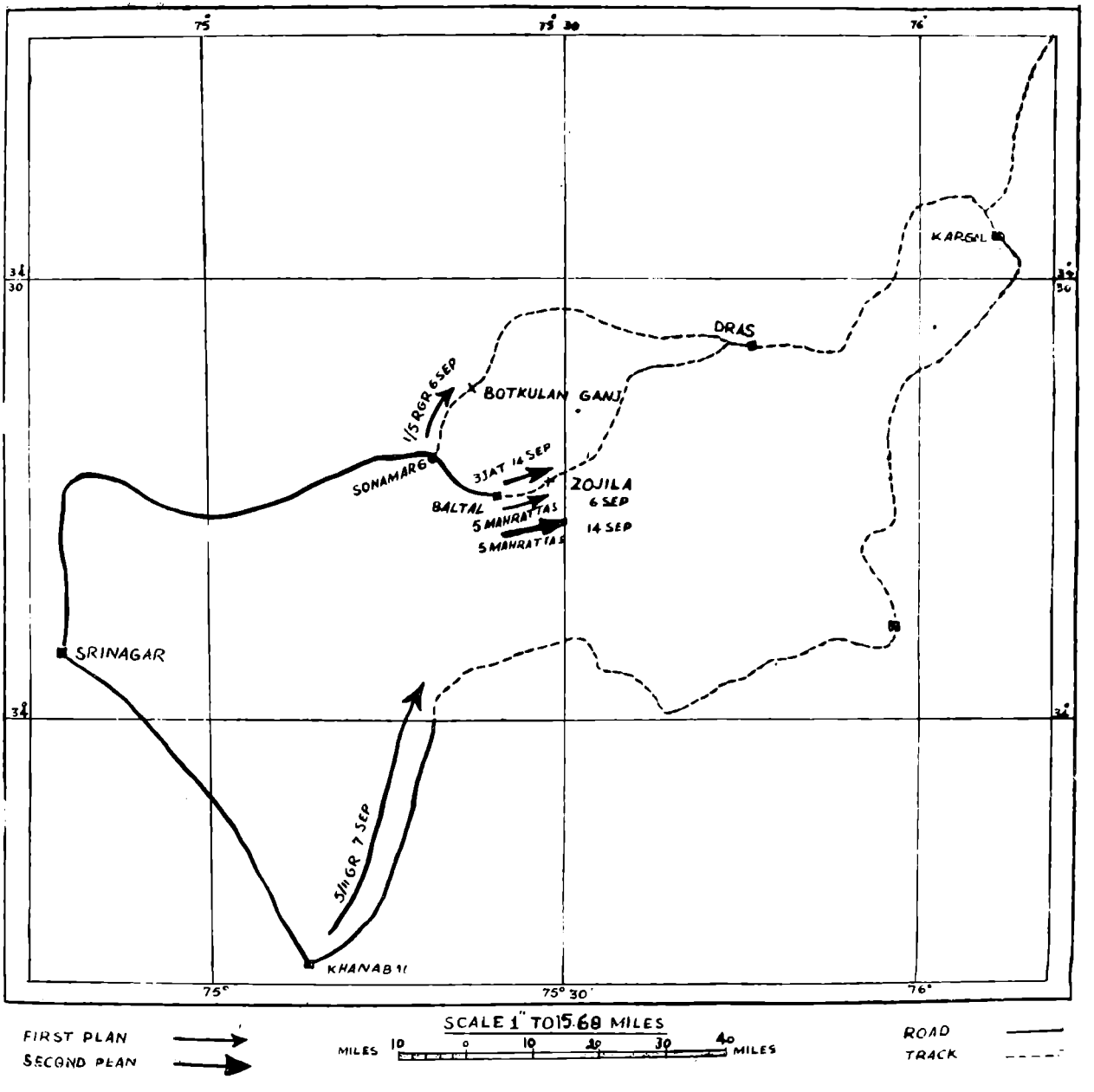
In late August 1948 when Arjun column with reinforcements for Leh had commenced its long trek from Manali, we had also made out plans for an assault on Zoji La. These reinforcements were expected in Leh by the middle of September and the period up to that time was critical for the defence of that remote outpost. It was, therefore, necessary that we commenced our operations against Zoji La early so as to keep the enemy engaged in this sector thereby relieving the pressure against Leh. The task of breaking through Zoji La was given to Brigadier Atal, Commanding 77 Para Brigade. Atal concentrated his brigade at Baltal at the foot of Zoji La by the end of August. His brigade comprised 5 Maratha Regiment, 3 Jat Regiment and 1/5 Royal Gorkha Rifles supported by a battery of 3.7 howitzers. 1 Patiala Infantry holding picquets around Baltal, covered the concentration of this force.

Our information about the enemy indicated that he had a complete battalion on either shoulder of Zoji La defile on the features Chabutra ridge and Mukand ridge. He also had positions in depth on another ridge behind these forward ridges which we had named Machine-gun ridge. This battalion was supported by 3-inch mortars, machine-guns and 3.7 howitzers. An assault against a battalion entrenched in caves on precipitous height over such a formidable defile presented a very difficult problem. The enemy was holding hill features, 16,000 feet or more in height, which dominated the barren low ground in the front for several hundred yards. Our assaulting infantry had to climb up through this bullet-swept area.

Atal's plans for this assault, which I am afraid had been named rather ominously Operation Duck, catered for a wide left hook by the Gorkhas via Botkulganj to Dras and a frontal assault against Chabutra and Mukand ridges by the Jats and Marathas respectively. A company of 5/11 Gorkha Rifles at Khanabal was at the same time to carry out diversionary operations towards Kargil via Suru.

Operation Duck commenced at 11.30 a.m. on 3rd September with the Gorkhas proceeding on the left hook to-

OPERATION DUCK



wards Botkulganj and another company of Gorkhas at Khanabal advancing towards Suru. The operation progressed satisfactorily till the 6th. The Gorkhas on the left had secured Botkulganj pass and were now advancing to Point 18,098. The main column advanced towards Zoji La and the Marathas secured their initial objectives by the morning. The diversionary column towards Suru was also making good progress. It was at this stage that the tide of battle started turning against us. The Gorkhas on the left hit a snow glacier and found further advance not possible. The enemy on the main front recaptured the position occupied by the Marathas forcing them to withdraw. These setbacks made it necessary to modify our plans for the operation.

Atal now withdrew the Gorkhas from their forbidding heights leaving a company to hold Botkulganj. The remainder of the battalion was concentrated at Baltal to be in reserve during the Maratha and Jat assault on Zoji La. More elaborate artillery fire support was provided. Air Force participation in the battle was also arranged. The second operation commenced on the 14th preceded by an artillery bombardment of 2000 shells. The two assaulting battalions advanced up to a few hundred yards short of their objective but found the final climb to the top of the ridge impossible against the enemy's heavy automatic fire. The battle ranged all day at a height of 15,000 feet but no further advance could be made. The attack had failed and we had to reluctantly call it off for the present. Our casualties had been heavy compared to our losses in other similar engagements in this theatre. We lost 29 killed, 72 wounded and 34 missing. As for the enemy, we had no information of his casualties but firing from inside his strongholds in excellent defensive positions, he could not have suffered many casualties. Despite these two failures, Cariappa was determined to try again and succeed. When asked for further orders about this operation, he said, "Change the name from Duck to Bison but continue we must, with our plan to get across Zoji La and capture Kargil."

Although Operation Duck had failed, we had neverthe-

less succeeded in keeping the enemy engaged and perhaps prevented his reinforcements in Kargil proceeding towards Leh. As mentioned earlier, the failure of this operation also brought out the necessity for despatching a second supply column from Manali which was duly sent by our administrative staff. We had now to take stock of the reasons for our inability to force Zoji La so that we could profit from these lessons in our subsequent effort. Cariappa was confident that he could force this pass before the winter.

The enemy also appeared to have guessed his intention. It was perhaps for this reason that Colonel Gilani, commander of enemy's Task Force 140 comprising amongst others 1/8 Punjab Regiment, had given orders for the assault on Leh in the middle of November. He must have appreciated that with our concentration against Zoji La it would be better to delay this operation at Leh till the winter, when the snows would block the pass and his flank at Zoji La would be secure.

A conference was held of all the commanders engaged in this operation at Srinagar. Cariappa presided and Shrinagesh, Thimayya and Atal attended the conference. Our new GSO 1, Lieutenant Colonel Badshah* who had replaced Lieutenant Colonel Bajwa, now BGS (Brigadier General Staff) to General Shrinagesh, represented the Command's General Staff at this conference. The reasons for our failure to break through Zoji La were analysed. It was agreed that against enemy positions dug in caves on those precipitous heights our artillery and air would have little effect. That was the reason for our assaulting infantry in Operation Duck, encountering such stiff opposition despite all the fire support given for the attack. There was, therefore, a need for a weapon with a flat trajectory which could advance protected through the enemy's bullet-swept area and effectively engage the enemy's positions to enable the infantry to climb up to the top. The distance to the objectives and the climb it entailed ruled out the possibility of a night attack as the infantry could not reach the objective

* Later Brigadier.

during the hours of darkness. The tank was the ideal weapon to give necessary support to the assaulting troops but it was a big problem to move tanks up to these heights. It was also agreed at this conference that there being no room for manoeuvre due to the difficult nature of the country, we would have to accept a frontal assault against Zoji La. If the infantry had to advance with the tanks along the road they had to be protected and the workshops were ordered to build overhead covers for tracked carriers, reminiscent of the "Kangaroos" used during the 1944 Normandy operations.

We now set about implementing the decisions of this conference. I am afraid Army Headquarters did not appear to share Cariappa's confidence in the success of Operation Bison (revised name for Duck) and Boucher, the Commander-in-Chief, wrote to him that, "Bison is a very hazardous military undertaking involving a great element of risk and luck for success." He directed that it was not to be undertaken until 70 per cent chances of success were assured. Cariappa, however, was 100 per cent sure of success and future events justified his confidence. Zoji La had to be forced before that winter, otherwise, like Skardu, the fate of Leh would be sealed. Due to the very uncertain weather at the pass, Cariappa decided to leave the final decision on the selection of D day for this operation with the local commanders.

While we were preparing plans for Operation Bison, the enemy in an effort to divert our attention had further intensified his activities against Tithwal and Uri. In Tithwal he made yet another determined bid to dislodge us from those positions. A brigade attack was launched against our forward positions preceded by heavy artillery concentrations but this attack was successfully repulsed and his attempt to outflank us by a move to the Nastachur Pass was also checked. Some very savage fighting took place on Richmarigali, south of Tithwal and in this fighting I Sikh again distinguished itself. A Param Vir Chakra was awarded to Lance Naik Karam Singh in this action. The threat to Tithwal had necessitated the switching over of the Jats from Zoji La to this sector. This required the bringing up of

another battalion from the South—4 Rajput Regiment—for Operation Bison. As for the Uri sector our medium guns now in position in that area had been engaging the enemy and providing an effective answer to his heavy shelling with both 25-pounders and 5.5-inch medium guns.

The two major decisions of the Srinagar conference held in late September, which had to be implemented were the move of a squadron of light tanks to Baltal and the provision of tracked carriers with overhead cover for the infantry. The move of light tanks over the 200 miles long Jammu-Srinagar road and then another 60 miles north-east to Baltal was not easy. Several bridges on this road were of low classification which would not stand the weight of these tanks. Diversions near most of them were not possible and the construction of so many new bridges would have taken a long time. This in its turn would have delayed the launching of this operation. However, the engineers had to build three new bridges. The Stuart tanks of 7 Cavalry with their turrets removed, were winched across the numerous bridges. It was indeed a remarkable achievement for both the armoured corps and the engineers to move these tanks upto Srinagar Valley within a fortnight. It was also necessary that the enemy should have no indication of the movement of these tanks, otherwise the success of the operation would have been jeopardised. It was fully realised that with a few anti-tank weapons and some anti-tank mines on Zoji La's narrow defile, the enemy could easily stop our tanks. Therefore, complete secrecy was imperative. This was ensured by moving the tanks only at night and keeping them covered in harbours by day. A curfew was imposed in Srinagar town when these tanks were moved through the town to Baltal. As for covered carriers for the infantry, the electrical and mechanical engineers in our Command Workshop got busy preparing models for overhead covers for carriers. Twelve of these covers, after they had been finally approved, were flown post-haste to Srinagar. I was present during their trials and I felt they would give our infantry a great measure of protection against enemy's small arms fire. We could not, however, use them in battle as it was found at

Baltal that the carriers could not cope with the extra weight of these covers and negotiate the steep climb at that height. The infantry, therefore, had to accept having to make do without these carriers. One was reminded of Wavell's famous saying, "The infantry-man bears the brunt. His casualties are heavier. He suffers greater extremes of discomfort and fatigue than the other arms."

By 18th October, 77 Para Brigade under Atal was again concentrated at Baltal and poised for another assault over the now familiar ground to Zoji La. The brigade had been given additional fire support for this operation. Besides a squadron of light tanks and armoured cars, we also had two batteries of 25-pounders and one battery of 3.7 howitzers to support the attack. The three battalions of this brigade now were, 4 Rajput Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Girdhari Singh, MC, 1/5 Royal Gorkha Rifles by Lieutenant Colonel A.S. Pathania, MC* and I Patiala Infantry by Lieutenant Colonel Sukhdev Singh, MC.† These three commanding officers had ably fought on different fronts in the last war—Africa, Italy, Burma and Java—but the operation in which they were now about to participate was to be unique from the point of view of hazards imposed by the elements. At their head was their calm, patient and unperturbed brigade commander, Brigadier Atal, who had for some time been successfully defying both the enemy and the elements in this theatre.

While troops were being concentrated at Baltal for this operation, the engineers were feverishly working on a jeep track up to the 11,578 feet high pass. It entailed working in full view of the enemy's positions and work in the later stages could only be carried out under cover of darkness by night. This track was of great importance to us as our plans for this operation visualised the tanks crossing the pass to take on enemy positions on the far end, the pass being about 2 miles long. The tank drivers familiarised themselves with this track by driving soft vehicles over it and by foot reconnaissance.

*Later Major General.
‡Later Brigadier.

Due to the terrain not affording any room for manoeuvre, a frontal assault against the enemy-held dominating ridges had been accepted at the Srinagar conference. The infantry was to assault the two ridges late in the afternoon with the Rajputs on the left and Gorkhas on the right. The tanks were to support both these assaults and thereafter push across to Gumri basin on the far side of the pass followed by the Patialas. As a measure of deception, we had again arranged for diversionary operations towards Suru on the right and for westward movement by day from Baltal towards Srinagar indicating that we had given up plans for an assault on Zoji La. We also prepared a fake Command Operation Instruction for operations from Gurais towards Dras.

The D-day for this operation was initially fixed as the 20th of October but the weather intervened and it snowed incessantly for several days. From our experience in this terrain, we had learnt that the ground became very slippery after fresh snowfall making it difficult for the infantry to climb steep gradients. D-day was, therefore, postponed first to the 25th of October and later to the 1st of November. With the winter fast approaching when the pass would be completely blocked with snow, it was imperative that this operation be launched early to allow time for necessary stocking beyond the pass for the winter. 1st of November was the last possible day to which we could safely postpone the commencement of this operation that year. Any further postponement would have meant delaying this operation till the spring of the following year. This would have made our position at isolated Leh very precarious, particularly when we had had information that enemy's Task Force 140 was to launch its offensive against Leh in late November.

For a while, the Gods of weather appeared to be merciful and the meteorological forecasts predicted that the weather would be clear on 1st November. It had even stopped snowing on the previous day. Wireless messages were flashed between different headquarters that D-day would be the 1st of November. But when the 1st of November dawned, snow-fall started again and there were signs

of a snow blizzard. The weather prospects for the next few days were also bleak. The Air Force could not operate on that day because of weather conditions. If the operation was launched it would have to be without any air support. Thimayya was faced with the very difficult decision as to whether or not he should launch the operation. He showed great determination and the capacity to accept risks. He decided that Zoji La must be assaulted as any postponement now would mean a postponement till the following year. This decision was a bit of a gamble but then war itself is gamble and a successful commander has often to be a determined gambler.

Due to heavy snow-fall on the hill-tops, plans for the assault of Chabutra and Mukand ridges had to be modified. The tanks were now to start at 10 a.m. to get across to the Gumri basin followed by the Gorkhas. They were to engage the enemy from behind while the Rajputs and the Patialas assaulted those positions frontally. The whole success of this plan depended upon the enemy not being aware of the presence of our tanks. With only a few anti-tank weapons he could easily block that narrow track.

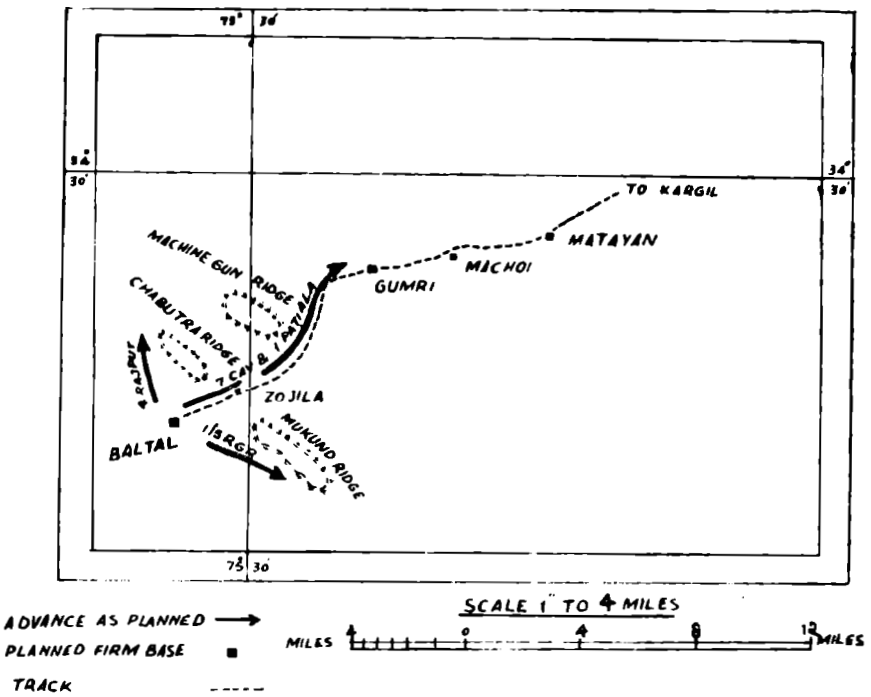
Sitting in our operations room that day I remember that when the clock struck ten my thoughts were with our troops starting from Baltal. I pictured to myself the tanks rumbling up to the pass and the Gorkhas advancing behind them with khukris. I cursed myself for being a staff officer who could only see these operations through cryptic situation reports rather than being with the troops actually engaged in the operation. Anyway, we soon started receiving reports of how the operation was progressing. The tanks had completely surprised the enemy and he was reported to be fleeing in panic. They had got across to Gumri basin by 2 p.m. that afternoon and were now shooting up the enemy from the rear. Thimayya himself had led this advance in the leading tank across the pass. Although his presence at the head of this column must have been a source of great inspiration to the troops, I am afraid it was a risk which we could ill afford to take. Divisional commanders are not supposed to expose themselves in battle like a leading scout. But Thimayya was a very unusual

divisional commander. Anyway all's well that ends well.

A snow blizzard had started when the tanks were advancing towards the pass. This blizzard proved providential for it had reduced visibility providing natural protection to the infantry advancing behind those tanks. Later we intercepted interesting wireless messages exchanged between the enemy command and his troops in the field. The latter reported the presence of these tanks but their headquarters would not believe that tanks could be brought up to Zoji La. A prompt reply was received from their headquarters that, "these so-called tanks must be camouflaged jeeps." However, their illusions about camouflage were soon dispelled.

It was now decided to exploit the successful breakthrough at Zoji La and give up the plan to assault Chabutra and Mukand ridges. The enemy was in any case fleeing from these ridges in disorder. The Patialas went forward through the Gorkhas who had gone with the tanks and they were ordered to assault Machoi on the far end of the pass that very night. A night operation with hardly any daylight reconnaissance is against all textbook teaching of tactics but the enemy was on the run and we were determined not to give him a chance to reorganise himself on the far side of the pass. The attack by the Patialas was very successful and amongst other things this battalion also captured an enemy mountain gun with a large quantity of ammunition. This was the first artillery piece captured intact by us in these operations.

By the 2nd, Atal had captured and cleared the whole of the two-mile long pass and the dominating heights on either side of the defile. It had meant some hard fighting and our troops had to brave the winter cold at those forbidding heights with no special winter clothing. It had been a great test of their endurance and they had come out of it with flying colours. Never before in military history had tanks been used at such height nor had a modern battle been fought under such hazardous conditions. The troops taking part in this operation had every reason to be proud of their achievement but they had no time to rest on their laurels. The advance beyond Zoji La had to continue as



OPERATION BISON PLAN FOR ASSAULT ON ZOJILA

Kargil, 40 miles East of the pass, was our objective and the link-up with Leh was our final goal. Cariappa sent them a signal on this successful breakthrough which read, "Convey my personal message to all ranks employed in Operation Bison my admiration of their splendid work under trying winter conditions. Tell them that there is nothing impossible for them, our gallant soldiers. Dras must repeat must be captured with little delay.... Advance forward to Kargil with all speed. Give no rest to the enemy until you have joined up with Leh."

The Rajputs took up the chase beyond Machoi. They captured Matayan 11 miles from Zoji La on the 4th. Our advance beyond Matayan was held up as the enemy entrenched himself on two dominating features at precipitous heights—Batkundi and Point 12967. Two unsuccessful attempts were made by us to dislodge the enemy from these features but those assaults had failed. The position at Matayan was much the same as had been at Zoji La. The enemy was again occupying positions in caves and could not be dislodged by infantry assault without effective fire support. One mountain battery (25-pounders could not cross the pass) which had come up to Matayan could not provide all the support that the infantry needed. It was decided to bring up the tanks again, but a track had first to be made before they could be brought up beyond Gumri. The engineers were ordered to blast the hill-sides and improve nulla beds to enable the tanks to move up. The whole operation was held up waiting for the tanks to concentrate at Matayan. This, however, proved a blessing in disguise for it enabled the administrative echelon to catch up with the progress of the operation. We commenced stocking for the winter, beyond the pass.

Cariappa appeared impatient with the delay at Matayan. He wanted the enemy opposition liquidated as soon as possible and the advance resumed. The enemy must not be given any respite for in these hills he could organise several delaying positions. Moreover, it was necessary that Dras was captured soon for that was the only place near Zoji La which could be developed as our base for the winter. The Army Commander called me one day and gave me a mes-

sage from Thimayya which read, "If at first you do not succeed, try try again. I know nothing is impossible for our troops. I must have Dras at any cost in the next day or two. Good luck to you all." I was also ordered to proceed to 77 Para Brigade Headquarters at Matayan and function like one of Montgomery's liaison officers sending messages direct to the Army Commander, cutting out the normal channel via division and corps and thereby saving on time.

I welcomed this opportunity of seeing these operations first hand and proceeded to my destination. I was in Baltal the following day and soon after, set out for Matayan. I was given a horse to ride across the pass to Matayan and I was assured that it was a very sure-footed and a sober animal. Not being a good rider, I was not too enthusiastic about riding in these mountains. The track at some places was very narrow, hardly two feet wide, and it was flanked by high hills on one side and a deep gorge on the other. The latter was over a 1000 feet deep. The engineers were at that time using explosives to blast hill-sides and improve the track to take tanks to Matayan. The echo of every explosion reverberated for several minutes in those hills and my horse did not appear to take too kindly to those sounds. It was difficult to continue riding on a shying horse where one false step would have taken us a thousand or more feet down the gorge. Being an infantryman I felt more sure on my two feet and I dismounted to walk the rest of the distance. The horse in the meanwhile turned and ran back to Baltal where, returning alone without his "rider", he caused some consternation.

At last, late in the afternoon I suddenly came across an open bit of flat ground with a two-roomed traveller's bungalow in the centre. I consulted my quarter inch map (larger scale map of this area had not been printed) and recognised that place as Matayan. From a distance one could see a lot of activity in the area of the small bungalow and I appreciated that the brigade headquarters must be lodged there. On arrival at the headquarters I was greeted kindly by Atal whom I had known when he was a staff officer at Army Headquarters. I made friends over a mug

of tea with his brigade major, Niranjan Singh,* who had had his first bath after a fortnight that day. It was very cold and ice crystals got formed in the beards of Sikhs. Niranjan had his beard covered with a piece of cloth not only to give it a proper shape but also to prevent ice crystals forming inside it.

I felt awkward in tagging myself to the brigade headquarters as I feared that commanders in the field would think that I was "spying for the big boss". However, my fears were soon set at rest by Atal's kind and Niranjan's friendly attitude. I on my part made it a point to show all my reports to Atal before despatch.

The engineers were proceeding expeditiously with the construction of track for the tanks. By the 13th this track had at last been made and the tanks were concentrated at Matayan. Sniping and patrol action continued during this period of enforced lull in the operations. Atal, with a big staff in his hand, continued to visit his forward positions and I was told that he had also gone out on patrols with his men. It was so inspiring to watch him proceed with his duties in his usual calm and unperturbed manner. I heard him give out his orders for the assault without a trace of excitement and it almost appeared as if we were listening to orders in a training exercise. There was, of course, almost constant enemy sniping and machine-gun fire from the nearby hills to remind us of the war that we were all fighting.

I was ordered to return to our headquarters at Delhi and I proceeded on my return journey on the 13th afternoon. I felt sorry for not having been able to stay on for the attack that was to go in that night but I returned with the consolation that circumstances had afforded me the opportunity of getting a good glimpse of this front. Atal suggested that I should take an escort with me for my return trek to Baltal. I felt it would be wrong of me to deplete the strength of our forward troops on the eve of this attack by their having to provide such extra duties. An endless convoy of ponies engaged in stocking covered al-

*Later Major General.

most the entire route from the pass to the brigade headquarters and I pointed out that the men in this convoy would provide the necessary security for my trek of 13 miles. I, therefore, returned alone. While I was returning Atal asked me to convey to the Army Commander that the Patiala Sikhs had resolved to celebrate Guru Nanak's birthday in Dras, which that year fell on 16th November. From what I had seen of the situation, I returned confident of our ability to break through Matayan that night and of the Sikhs keeping their promise.

On my return journey I committed the mistake of trying to explore a short cut on my own. I left the pony track in an attempt to do so. Some time later I discovered that I had climbed the wrong hill and had lost my way in the process. To make matters worse I had also sprained my ankle which forced me to take a little rest. For the small enemy parties still lurking on those hills, a solitary staff officer would have been a good bag. I tried to memorise every detail of Atal's plan for the attack on Batkundi with the Gorkhas and Patialas and the plans for his subsequent advance to Dras and beyond. I had made notes of these plans in my notebook which in the circumstances I could not now carry for fear of capture. After having memorised my notes I destroyed them and proceeded to find my way to Machoi. It soon got dark as the sun sets rather abruptly in winter in these parts. Although I knew the general direction in which I was to move, I was not too sure of it in the dark night. The odds were even of my ultimately fetching up with our troops or walking into the enemy or for that matter finding James Hilton's Shangri La. There is a pass marked Shangri La on the map not far from Zoji La and it is possible that it was this Shangri La which had inspired Hilton to write his famous book, *Lost Horizon.* Anyway after a tiring and anxious trek across those snow-covered steep hills, to my great relief, I located some lights on a far hill. Though far away from where I then was, these lights radiated much needed warmth to me at the thought of finding shelter for the night. It would have been deadly to spend the night in the open on the snow at that altitude. I knew it was against all orders to have

any exposed lights at night but I was all the same very grateful to whoever the person was who had disobeyed these orders. My only fear was that the lights may be extinguished before I got to the foot of that hill and I may lose my way again. There could of course be no doubt that those lights must have been lit by our troops as enemy patrols or small parties trying to escape would not dare to do so.

I ultimately managed to walk up to those lights and found that they were coming from the traveller's hut at Machoi where an animal transport company was staying for the night. It had been an exciting and exacting trek for me. Apart from the risk of bumping into an enemy party it also at times meant wading through ice-cold freezing water in the streams which I kept crossing and recrossing that night. Every time I came out of the water I felt that my legs had been chopped off. The water on the trousers would freeze and my boots would collect more snow and pebbles. It was a wonder how I managed to escape frost-bite that night. While I was groping my way in the dark towards Machoi, I could already hear the noise of artillery and machine-gun fire in the distance. Atal had commenced his assault on Batkundi.

A daffadar at Machoi came to my rescue. He vigorously rubbed mineral jelly on my feet to prevent frost-bite and helped me to get to the advance dressing station at Gumri where the doctor gave me some preventive treatment, the most important and welcome item being a glass of rum. The jeep track from Baltal to Gumri across the pass had now been made and I managed to get a lift in an ambulance jeep going back that night with a casualty. I later discovered that ours was one of the first few jeeps to cross the pass. Crossing a pass at night is easier for the nerves. One is kept blissfully ignorant of the driving hazards as one cannot see gaping gorges in the dark!

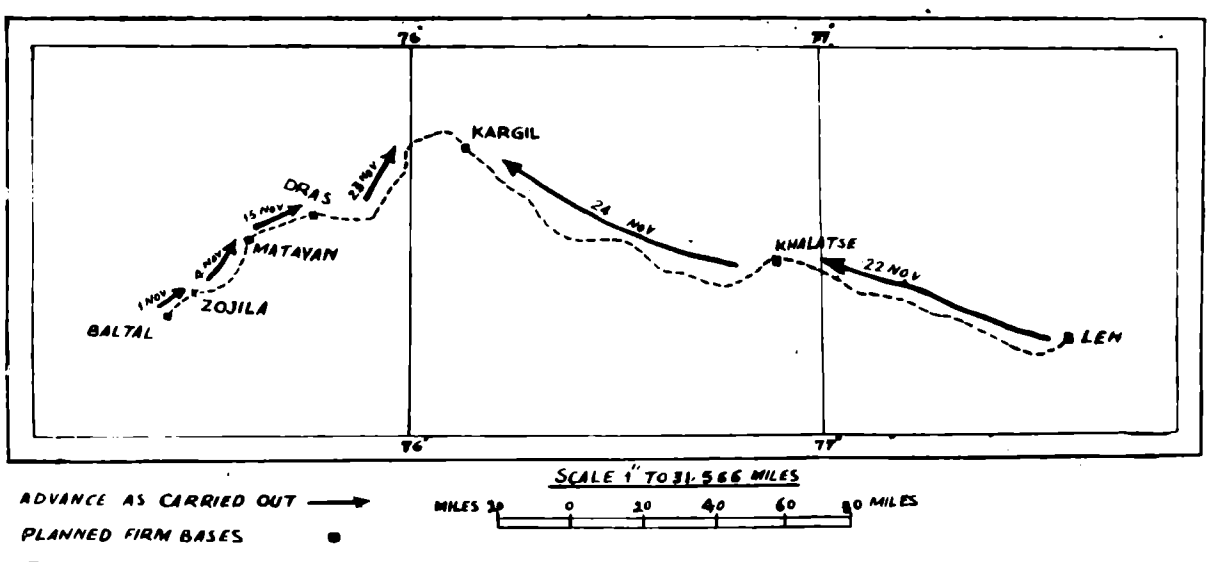
Atal's assault proceeded according to plan while I rested in the warm comfort of seven blankets at Baltal. The following day I started for our headquarters and submitted my report to the Army Commander. We had in the meanwhile already received reports of our successful break-

through and the advance to Dras which was entered by the Patialas on the 15th afternoon. They had kept their promise and were in time to celebrate Guru Nanak's birthday. The locals turned out to greet our troops and organised a civic reception for Thimayya. The Sikhs gathered all the children from the villages and distributed sweets among them. A village elder came up with tears of gratitude and remarked about the great difference between the enemy's "commandeering" and our "distributing" methods. About this time while the Sikhs were distributing sweets to the village children and Thimayya was being feted with a spontaneous civic reception at Dras, we received a signal from Army Headquarters, "Again emphasise that behaviour of our troops must always be exemplary at all times so that no opportunity is afforded to enemy press to make anti-Indian propaganda." This signal had of course been sent in good faith and perhaps showed enthusiastic staff work but the word "again" at the beginning of the message was not likely to make the recipient feel too happy. Cariappa wrote back, "I shall be most grateful if I am informed of any information of any misbehaviour of my troops, which necessitated this reminder." We received a prompt and tactful reply, "It was not a reminder but a prudent aide memoire." I mention this exchange of correspondence to bring out the necessity for a staff officer selecting every word of his message carefully. Anyway, I suppose such correspondence adds spice to the dull daily routine of office work.

Our advance to Dras had broken the back of the resistance put up by the enemy. We continued this advance and by the 23rd we reached Kargil, the objective of Operation Bison after mopping up small pockets *en route*. In the meanwhile our garrison at Leh also took the offensive and advanced westwards. They drove the enemy from Khalatse bridge on 22nd November and by the 24th, linked up with Atal's troops advancing from Kargil. The whole of Ladakh had been cleared of the enemy who had now taken to the hills in the North towards Skardu.

In this operation the enemy suffered heavily. His battle casualties totalled 318 killed. Besides we also captured a

LINK-UP WITH LEH



3.7 howitzer gun, mortars ranging from 4.2 inch to 2 inch and other small arms. The most welcome bag, however, were the warm jackets, blankets and 3000 maunds of firewood captured at Dras. They helped our troops to keep themselves warm in that winter cold. Our battle casualties had been only 40 killed and 86 wounded, in this operation. We had fought both the enemy and the elements in this sector but the latter took a heavier toll of casualties from us. We had about 350 cases of frost-bite, most of which were caused by the sudden and very heavy snowfall on the 1st of December. As a result of this snowfall, 75 jeeps, 130 Dodges and 59 mules got buried in the snow while most of their drivers managed to scramble their way to safety at the cost of extensive frost-bites. More than 80 per cent of these buried vehicles were duly recovered next spring and put on the road. The anti-freeze mixture in these vehicles had saved them during the winter months.

Though our transport fleet being marooned in the snow was a mishap, all our objectives for the operation had been successfully achieved. We had liberated the territory from Zoji La to Leh and had liquidated the enemy's threat to Ladakh. Our soldiers had not only decisively beaten the enemy in spite of all his advantages of ground but had also mastered the hazards of the bleak heights of the cold Himalayas. Cariappa's confidence in the success of this operation and his determination to see it through had borne fruit. The Lamas at Leh could once again peacefully sit at their prayer wheels and pray for the salvation of the human soul.

7

The Cease-fire

OUR OPERATIONS in November for tre relief of Punch and the breakthrough at Zoji La had not only removed the threat to Punch and Leh but had also liberated several thousand square miles of territory. The enemy's losses had been considerable and what was perhaps more serious for him, was the great loss of face that he had suffered. Despite the open intervention of Pakistan's regular forces, he had received a crippling blow in these battles. The United Nations resolution of 13th August 1948 calling for immediate cease fire in Kashmir, though originally rejected by Pakistan, now began to find favour among her leaders. As for India, she had accepted this resolution at the very start and was prepared to abide by it, if Pakistan now changed her mind and also accepted it as the basis for settling the Kashmir problem.

Pakistan, of course, had to attempt an offensive operation prior to agreeing to a cease-fire, if for no other reason at least to raise the morale of her troops. Moreover, she perhaps wanted to achieve certain local gains so that she may be in an advantageous position during the cease-fire parleys. This offensive opened at 11 a.m. on 14th December when the enemy started heavy shelling of our positions in Naushera-Beripattan area. More than 5000 shells from all types of artillery pieces—25-pounders, 5.5-inch medium guns and 3.7 heavy anti-aircraft guns in ground role—were fired in 24 hours by the enemy. His main effort appeared to be directed against 4 Dogra Regiment and 1/9 Gorkha

Rifles holding Chhawa ridge and Punjab hill, south of Naushera. The bridge at Beripattan on the road to Naushera also came in for his special attention. The Dogras and the Gorkhas held firm despite this heavy shelling. Later, the enemy's fire was thickened by a regiment of Sherman tanks also joining in the battle against us. This shelling continued till the 17th when two enemy battalions advanced towards Chhawa ridge and Punjab hill hoping that we would have abandoned those positions because of heavy plastering. The enemy battalions, however, were sorely disappointed and had to recoil against the fire of the defenders.

The enemy had concentrated his light and heavy anti-aircraft guns around his gun positions. Our aircraft found it difficult to engage these guns due to the heavy flak put up by hostile anti-aircraft guns. Our artillery, however, responded and engaged enemy artillery in counter-bombardment. Although unable to dislodge us from any of our positions, the enemy secured several hits on the road between Naushera and Beripattan. The bridge at Beripattan was damaged and we were forced to open an alternative route via Sunderbani. Our losses in casualties despite this heavy shelling were surprisingly low and it brought home to us an important lesson that a battle cannot be won by shelling alone, no matter how heavy that may be. The enemy's advance towards Chhawa ridge and Punjab hill had appeared half-hearted and not well co-ordinated. Except for this movement, his infantry made no determined effort to assault any of our positions.* He had, however, succeeded in temporarily preventing us from using the road but we had in the meantime opened an alternative route to Naushera. This was, therefore, only a poor consolation to the enemy for all the effort he must have put in to organise this shelling.

Although the situation appeared serious during the shelling and we were expecting a determined effort by the

*It is interesting to note that this was also the broad pattern followed by Pakistan Army in the 1965 war. They appeared to place undue reliance on heavy shelling. The infantry was invariably shy to press home its attack.

enemy to cut off our line of communication, we were confident in our ability to hold out. One only had to see the troops who were taking all this "punishment" to be convinced that we would be able to keep the enemy at bay. The cheerful spirit of our jawans going through all that shelling was a great morale booster for any worried commanders in the field.

In the event, all this shelling turned out to be only a flicker of the flame. The enemy realised the futility of continuing these operations in view of his inability to secure any local victories and also in the light of his mounting losses in this theatre. As mentioned earlier, the 13th of August resolution became suddenly acceptable to Pakistan.

On the afternoon of the 31st of December, we received warning orders from Army Headquarters that a cease-fire was in the offing. This was later followed by executive orders, ordering a cease-fire on all fronts with effect from midnight on 1st January 1949. The New Year ushered a "climate of peace" for carrying out negotiations to settle the Kashmir problem peacefully.

We at the headquarters had a sleepless night transmitting orders and issuing further instructions regarding the cease-fire. I could not help comparing that night with another sleepless night we had had on the 26th of October 1947 before troops were despatched to Kashmir. In 1947 I had not visualised that these operations would be so prolonged or extensive and now, on the first day of 1949, I again could not foresee the future course of events creating an endless stalemate in Kashmir.

Soon after the cease-fire, we had a change in our Army Commander. Our old Army Commander, General Cariappa, had now been promoted and appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. The main burden for conducting these operations for one full year had fallen on Cariappa's able shoulders. As the Army Commander guiding these operations throughout this difficult period, he had during the past few months led us to victory against Pakistan's regular forces. With our erstwhile commander now taking over as the Chief of the Indian Army, we at

the headquarters felt a legitimate sense of pride.

Lieutenant General Shrinagesh* took over as our new Commander. Shrinagesh was no stranger to our headquarters for we had all known him as the Corps Commander in Jammu and Kashmir for the past four months. I had also served in the same brigade with him in Burma when he was commanding a battalion of the 19th Hyderabad Regiment.†

A certain amount of readjustment by the staff to conform to a change in the commander is of course always necessary. But being familiar with the ideas of our new commander, we found it easy to adapt ourselves to the change quickly. Having already operated for four months in Kashmir, Shrinagesh was well suited to deal with the "problems of peace" that now faced us at the headquarters.

Cease-fire had been ordered in Kashmir after fifteen months of hard fighting. The troops in the field could not relax as constant vigil had to continue. For us on the staff, the cease-fire ushered in a period of "paper war". The operations staff now found itself examining allegations and counter-allegations of cease-fire violations. We had often to examine these problems in the context of international formalities and diplomatic niceties. I found myself in strange surroundings. It had been much easier to deal with operation orders and situation reports than the innumerable long-worded and polite letters that we now started receiving.

At this stage it would be worthwhile to consider the salient points of the 13th of August resolution, which was the basis for the cease-fire. This was our virtual bible in the light of which every problem had to be examined. Anything contrary to this resolution or the spirit of this resolution had to be rejected. This resolution visualised the settlement of the Kashmir problem "in three phases", as we would say in army terminology. These phases were the cease-fire, the truce and the determination of the future

*Later General and Chief of the Army Staff.
†Redesignated

status of Jammu and Kashmir in accordance with the will of the people. The last phase was primarily a political issue, the process of finding out the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir as to the future status of their State. The army was directly involved only in the first two phases, the cease-fire and the truce. I shall dwell on these phases in detail and mention some of their important aspects affecting us:

(a) The Cease-fire

(i) There was to be an immediate cease-fire in the State with the agreement of India and Pakistan. (*Note.* This agreement had been arrived at and the cease-fire was brought about on the 1st of January 1949).

(ii) Neither side should augment its military potential in the State. (*Note:* This really meant that neither side should increase the strength of its forces in this theatre or stockpile warlike stores. Any attempt to abide by it too literally, led to a lot of difficulties. Even strengthening of the roof of a broken bunker or the digging of an additional trench could now be misconstrued as increasing one's "military potential". And this would lead to endless correspondence and investigations!)

(iii) The Commanders-in-Chief of India and Pakistan should meet immediately to agree on local changes in the dispositions of their forces to facilitate the cease-fire (*Note:* This really meant the delineation of an agreed cease-fire line between the opposing forces. As we shall presently see, it took over a year to delineate this line on the ground).

(iv) The United Nations Commission would appoint military observers to "supervise the observance of the cease-fire order."

(b) The Truce

(i) As the presence of Pakistan troops in Jammu and Kashmir constituted "a material change in the situation since it was represented by the Government of Pakistan before the Security Council", Pakistan should withdraw

all her troops from the State and use "its best endeavour to secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistan nationals." (*Note*: The provisions of this clause virtually recognised the aggression committed by Pakistan against Jammu and Kashmir but refrained from saying so in so many words. The non-implementation of this provision of the resolution by Pakistan was the rock on which the plebiscite proposal foundered).

(ii) On notification of the above withdrawal by Pakistan which would terminate "the situation which was represented by the Government of India to the Security Council as having occasioned the presence of Indian forces in the State", India should begin to withdraw the "bulk" of her forces from Jammu and Kashmir (*Note*: This clause implied the acceptance of our legal position vis-a-vis Jammu and Kashmir, conceding the legality of the State's accession to India. Whereas Pakistan was to withdraw all her regular forces and endeavour also to withdraw all her nationals, we were permitted to retain some forces in the State. Ultimately, this clause led to endless discussions and correspondence blocking the full implementation of this resolution. No mutually agreed decision could be reached on the timing and process of withdrawal nor on the meaning of the word "bulk" as to whether it implied 51 per cent, 75 per cent or 90 per cent.)

I have given the various aspects of the two phases pertaining to the Cease-fire and the Truce in some detail and have endeavoured to annotate some of the clauses so that the reader may appreciate the niceties of the problems of peace that now faced us. The annotations in brackets are of course my own interpretations and do not necessarily represent any official views. Just as during operations in Kashmir I found it necessary to memorise names and locations of obscure places together with their map references, I now found myself learning by heart the various provisions of this resolution. I had in virtual fact now become a general staff officer (Cease-fire) instead of a general staff officer (Operations)!

The two Commanders-in-Chief, General Cariappa of India and General Gracey of Pakistan, met at Delhi within a fortnight of the cease-fire, to give the Cease-fire Line a more formal basis. This meeting, held on 15th January, directed that there should be no forward movement by the two armies from the positions held by them on the date of the cease-fire. This decision required a clearly demarcated line of forward defended localities on both sides. With a view to securing agreement on such a line, a Truce Sub Committee of Indian and Pakistan representatives was formed.

The Truce Sub Committee held a meeting at Delhi on the 12th of March 1949 and reached an agreement about the cease-fire line from Munawar in the south to the Jhelum in the north with the exception of certain disputed pockets like Aniwas, Pirkanthi and Ledigali. No agreement could be reached on a line beyond the Jhelum to Keran in the north and thence east to Ladakh Valley. In these sectors there were wide gaps of no man's land between the forward defended localities of the two armies. It was decided to accept these gaps and maintain the status quo in these areas. Neither side was to move into these gaps although both sides had put forward claims and counter claims.

What with Pakistan's intransigence and repeated breaches of the cease-fire agreement, the no man's land experiment proved a failure. Moreover, the 12th of March meeting had drawn a thick line across a quarter inch map showing the cease-fire line. On the ground this line covered a width of 2 to 3 miles. It was, therefore, not easy to use it as a working basis on the ground. There was a need for a clearly demarcated line separating the two opposing forces.

With the advent of spring and the melting of snows on the high mountains which separated the two armies in the north during the winter months, cases of cease-fire violations started assuming serious proportions. The major infiltrations by Pakistan were south of the Kishenganga river into the Lolab valley, south of Burzilbai Pass towards Gurais and south-east of Burzilbai Pass into the Tilel valley. There were, besides, several other cases of minor

infiltrations in other sectors. The infiltrations south of the Kishenganga into the Lolab valley had been most serious and had forced us also to advance our positions up to the line of watershed over the hills so that our line of communication to Tithwal was not interfered with. The picquets of the two armies in Lolab were now close to each other and in some cases only a few yards apart. There had also been a case in this sector when Pakistan irregulars had attacked one of our picquets with bayonets but were duly beaten back.

These infiltrations had been reported to the United Nations Commission and were investigated but the results were inconclusive. Pakistan had also accused us of cease-fire violations but these accusations had been baseless and were made only to confuse the issue. The most important of these accusations was our alleged infiltration into the Tilel valley. The story behind this allegation went back to December 1948, one month before the cease-fire. Jemadar Akbar Khan and a party of Pakistan sepoys had been sent on a patrol into this valley. They were reported to have committed several atrocities against the locals, specially against their womenfolk. The Jemadar had maintained a "harem" during the short time when his word had become law for the helpless and unarmed Kashmiri Muslims of Tilel. On the 16th of December 1948, the locals had murdered all the members of this patrol as a revenge for the atrocities they had perpetuated. On the date of the cease-fire there were, therefore, no troops of either side in this valley and as such we claimed it was a no man's land into which neither party could now send any troops. At a meeting on the 18th of February between General Thimayya and Brigadier Sher Khan, Director of Military Operations of the Pakistan Army, it was decided to send a joint patrol into Tilel valley to investigate the circumstances under which the Pakistan patrol had been murdered. For twelve weeks our commander at Gurais tried in vain to get the opposite local commander of Pakistan to despatch the agreed joint patrol into this valley. In the meanwhile Pakistan troops had already infiltrated south from Burzilbai Pass and there were rumours amongst the

locals that they were coming into the valley to take revenge for the murder of their compatriots. There was also acute shortage of cloth and salt in the valley and the locals repeatedly approached our commander at Gurais for help. With concrete evidence of Pakistan infiltrations south of Burzilbai Pass, and in view of the Pakistan commander not cooperating in sending a joint patrol, our local commander sent a patrol with salt and cloth on a mercy mission to Tilel. This was promptly declared by Pakistan as a major breach of the cease-fire agreement and she reinforced her troops in the valley.

At this stage the United Nations Commission suggested a full dress conference at Karachi in July 1949 of the military representatives of the two countries to amicably resolve these disputes and arrive at an agreed cease-fire line. This proposal was accepted by both sides, and the stage was set for the Karachi cease-fire conference.

Late one afternoon in July 1949 when I was struggling with the mass of futile correspondence that surrounded me regarding cease-fire violations, Dubey, who had been our Brigadier General Staff for over a year, sent for me. He told me that Shrinagesh was to lead the Indian delegation to Karachi and that I had to accompany the Army Commander as the secretary of the delegation. I naturally felt thrilled at this opportunity of being closely associated with an international conference which we hoped would draw the final curtain over military operations in Kashmir. Dubey felt that as I had been associated with these operations from the very beginning, I should go to Karachi despite the fact that I was such a junior officer. It was indeed kind of him to have thought of me for this important assignment and I felt grateful to him. I had worked under him through the difficult days of operations and the "peace" period that had followed. I had always found in him a very kind and indulgent boss. Being the principal general staff officer of our headquarters, he had to shoulder grave responsibilities and tackle difficult problems. He had led the general staff team very successfully through all the trials. He had in the process built great *esprit de corps* amongst us all.

My first task as the secretary of the Indian delegation was to prepare a paper on the "cease-fire line" for a high-level conference the following morning. I was not told as to who all would attend the conference but had reasons to believe that it would be at the highest level. I went through the mass of paper that we had on the subject and had a paper ready for Shrinagesh the following morning. I discussed the paper with him and after he finalised it, we proceeded across the road to the Secretariat. We were soon in front of a room in the Foreign Ministry with a simple unostentatious board displaying no high-sounding appointments nor any of the letters of the alphabet after the name. Even the usual prefixes before the name like Sri or Mr., were not there. The name plate had just "Jawaharlal Nehru" written on it.

I had not visualised the level of our "high-level conference but standing in front of the Prime Minister's room the importance of our mission began to dawn on me. As we entered the room he greeted us with his usual disarming smile, a smile with which I was familiar as I had often seen it from a distance at public meetings as part of a large throng. Not unnaturally, I felt overawed as I entered his room. I wondered whether he could have guessed the thoughts that came to me at that moment. I thought of Nehru the inspiring leader of the masses and the political heir to the Father of the Nation, and also the Nehru who had led us so brilliantly in our struggle for independence. As students we had regarded him as the symbol of the country's youth, although he was thirty-five years ahead of us in age. He had become this symbol by virtue of the youthful spirit he always displayed and not in terms of his age. I remembered how he had obliged me with his autograph when as a schoolboy I had approached him for it in 1936. I also remembered how his visit to Singapore in 1946 before he came to power, had caused a frenzy of enthusiasm not only amongst the Indian Army personnel stationed there but also amongst the local Malayans and Chinese. And now Nehru was the Prime Minister on whose able shoulders had fallen the responsibility of shaping the destiny of our nation.

He had also become a great international statesman who commanded universal respect in the councils of the world. He was steadily growing into the international colossus he was soon to become, whose positive contribution to peace would be acknowledged and respected alike by the most fanatic communist and the most sceptical westerner. And it was this Nehru, a combination of several facets of human achievements, who was sitting before me in his austerely simple and neat room. His room did not have any of the luxurious fittings that decorate the offices of the innumerable senior officials in Delhi. There was no thick pile of carpet, nor velvet curtains nor any heavily leathered chairs. Immaculately clean and fitted with all the necessities of an office, his room with a light blue distempering on the wall, had a very business-like atmosphere. A bowl of red roses tastefully arranged and placed in the corner gave a homely touch to the simple setting. On the wall there hung only one photograph from the picture rail, a photograph with which most of us are familiar—the smiling portrait of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru reclining against a "masnad" and sharing a joke.

I was lost in my reverie when my chain of thoughts was suddenly broken by someone quietly nudging me and asking for a map of Jammu and Kashmir. I promptly took this map out of my briefcase and spread it on the table before the Prime Minister. Our complete delegation had assembled. Apart from Shrinagesh, the leader, there were Thimayya and Manekshaw, as well as the two civilian members Sri H. M. Patel and Sri Vishnu Sahay, Defence Secretary and Secretary (Kashmir affairs), respectively. There were also present at this meeting our Commander-in-Chief General Cariappa, the Secretary-General Sri Girja Shankar Bajpai and Sri Gopalaswamy Iyenger. The latter two had in the past often championed our case at the United Nations and they gave us some useful tips on the "tricks of the trade" in dealing with international conferences.

All the points in dispute regarding the cease-fire line were discussed at length. We were given a ruling by the Prime Minister as to the extent to which we could accept compromise on various issues. I was particularly struck by

his intimate knowledge of the geography of Kashmir. He knew many obscure places on the map and would readily appreciate the peculiar problems of terrain in different sectors. Being a keen mountaineer he had in his young days trekked in most of these remote parts and I believe he had spent his honeymoon in the traveller's hut at Baltal which had been the base for our breakthrough operations at Zoji La. Many of the visitor's books of dak bungalows in Kashmir had his signature dating back to the first world war and in some he had made caustic remarks.

Another person who impressed me by his brilliance at that conference was Girja Shankar Bajpai. It was indeed a pleasure listening to his arguments and the way he would discuss the pros and cons of a problem. His interpretation of certain clauses of the 13th of August resolution was enlightening. He maintained that this resolution had conceded the legality of Kashmir's accession to India and as such no man's land, if any, should be controlled by India during the period of cease-fire and truce. This meant that the onus of proof to convince the Commission of any factual position, on the date of cease-fire, in any disputed territory, rested with Pakistan. In the absence of any such convincing proof and even if India had no troops on the date of cease-fire in that area, the disputed territory should automatically come under Indian control. This convincing and legalistic argument proved a trump card in our hands at Karachi. Based on this, we obtained control of several hundred square miles of State territory where we were not in position on the date of the cease-fire. I remember Bajpai's thoughtful advice to me after the conference, "Young man, you have to be very careful about all your secret papers at Karachi. Keep them under lock and key in the High Commission and not with you in the hotel."

Armed with the knowledge acquired at this conference as also the Prime Minister's personal directive regarding the compromise we could arrive at, I now prepared a fresh paper for all the members of the delegation. I tackled the problem in much the same way as the writing of a tactical exercise. The problems under discussion and the opposing viewpoints presented by Pakistan and us had been placed

on white paper and our detailed notes thereon for our members were typed on pink paper like DS* solutions and marked top secret. The distribution of the pink papers had of course to be kept very restricted. They included the possible arguments which Pakistan was likely to put up together with our answers for the same. For preparing such notes I would suggest that one should first have a "dry run" of discussions with a syndicate formed of officers to represent the opposing delegation. We, of course, did not have the time to organise such a preparatory exercise.

After various preliminaries and briefing conferences, we got ready to proceed to Karachi in a specially chartered plane placed at our disposal. On the morning of the 17th of July we assembled at Willingdon airport. Just before our scheduled time of departure a press correspondent came up to me to inquire of the prospects at Karachi. Never having been approached by a press correspondent, I felt at a loss but needless to say I felt important! I felt his question called for an answer but for obvious reasons it was hardly right of me to commit myself to anything. I, therefore, parried his question by saying that the meteorological forecast for the weather at Karachi was bright. This created a bit of laughter. Later, I was told that my answer had been in keeping with the occasion!

After flying non-stop from Delhi over the arid deserts of Rajasthan and Sind, we arrived in Karachi by midday of the 17th of July 1949. A warm reception by the Pakistan delegation awaited us at the airport and there were of course the usual protocol formalities and press photographers. I must add that the Pakistan Press appeared to have taken kindly to me for they had overnight promoted me several rungs in the ladder of army ranks. These papers made me a General and wrote Major General instead of Major as my rank. Perhaps it was the printer's devil that had caused the mistake but I certainly did not feel sorry that such a mistake had been made!

*DS stands for Directing Staff who conduct discussions in training exercises.

There was also an occasion when one of our senior diplomats at an evening party had mistaken me for General Thimayya, despite the fact that I was wearing a Major's uniform. After a few minutes of polite conversation, when he discovered his mistake, he quietly proceeded to another corner and I to a corner where one is to be seen and not heard.

From the airfield we proceeded with a Pakistan escort to Beach Luxury Hotel, where we were all staying. Only a few months earlier we had been fighting an "undeclared war" with Pakistan. The social niceties at Karachi appeared a little out of context. Shrinagesh's red and black flag with the Ashoka chakra on it flown on a Pakistan Army's black Humber displaying Pakistan Army's green sign of the crescent and star, appeared incongruous. Anyway, the fighting in Kashmir was over for the present and we were then the guests of the Pakistan Government.

The following day we started our deliberations with the Pakistan delegation, in Karachi's Council Chamber. It was a bit amusing to see the sullen face of the crowd assembled at the gate as we entered the Chamber and then to see the same crowd break into cheers as the Pakistan delegation arrived. It was almost like a game of football where crowds cheer their own teams except that our crowd was miles away across the border in India.

The United Nations Commission was represented at the conference by two delegates, Mr Hernando Sampier (Colombia), the chairman, and Mr. Williams (United States). They had, besides, Lieutenant General Delvoie and Mr. Martin as their military and legal advisers. The chairman was a young man in his twenties who appeared very affable and accommodating. He sat at the head of a rectangular table flanked by the other member and his advisers. The white clothes worn by the United Nations representatives (Delvoie, being from the Beligan Army, wore white uniform) provided a colour of peace balancing between our olive green on one side of the table and Pakistan's khaki on the other.

Pakistan was represented at this conference by Major General W. J. Cawthorn, their Deputy Chief of the General

Staff, Major General Nazir Ahmed. Commander of their 9 Frontier Division opposing us in Kashmir and Brigadier Sher Khan, their Director of Military Operations. Their civilian members were Mr Ayub and Mr Khan from their Defence and Kashmir Ministries. Cawthorn, who was their leader, was an old soldier of the Indian Army. His attitude, I am afraid, did not appear too friendly and he was always uncompromising during discussions. This may, however, have been a part of his mental make-up or it may have been forced upon him as he was a foreign national leading the Pakistan delegation, but be that as it may, I could not help feeling that he did not have the ideal conference table finesse about him. Nazir Ahmed on the other hand was extremely friendly and gave the impression of being a happy-go-lucky man. He would often reduce the tension of a heated discussion by punctuating it with his keen sense of humour. It was an irony that Thimayya and he who were so friendly with each other and had been cadets together at Sandhurst, should now be the two opposing divisional commanders in Kashmir. Nazir Ahmed was later said to be involved in the Pakistan conspiracy case and was taken into detention by his Government. Sher Khan, their other member, appeared to be the "brain" of their delegation. Cold and calculating, he impressed me with his detailed knowledge of the points in dispute and of the terrain in Kashmir. Though puritanic in his personal habits, he combined a human outlook with a high degree of professional proficiency. I recalled that at the time of Partition, he had come to our directorate at General Headquarters as the Pakistan's Director to Military Operations designate. We had worked together for a few weeks and I had bought his car when he was leaving Delhi in August 1947. He sold that car to me for Rs. 500 than an actual offer he had received from a civilian businessman in my presence. He said that he had already fixed the price of his car as Rs 500 less for a junior officer of the Service and had agreed to give me preference. It required a great deal of character to voluntarily accept this loss at a time when relations between the two communities in India were so strained and when

we were parting from each other for good. Incidentally the first question Sher Khan asked me when I met him at Karachi airport was about his old car. With all his qualities, Sher Khan was an asset to any army. I was sorry to hear that later he died in an air crash soon after he had been promoted Major General.

The first day of our meeting was spent discussing the rules of procedure and then followed an inconclusive discussion about the plenipotentiary powers of the two delegations. Cawthorn argued that his delegation had been given these powers by Pakistan Government and that the Indian delegation must also have similar powers. It was easy for Pakistan to argue about plenipotentiary powers when the conference was taking place at Karachi and the Pakistan delegation could always easily obtain a ruling from its government. However, it was ultimately agreed to tackle problems as they arose instead of trying to argue unnecessarily about the delegations enjoying plenipotentiary powers.

The next day, General Delvoie, who was the Commission's military adviser, presented us with a line which he felt was a fair compromise between the conflicting claims of India and Pakistan. On close scrutiny we found that this line virtually conceded all the claims of Pakistan. We had a hurried adjournment to consider Delvoie's line in detail. We had not visualised that we would be presented with a line by the Commission at Karachi. This line could well have been sent to us by post obviating the necessity for such a full dress conference. Our delegation, however, was not baffled by the element of surprise this sudden "award" involved. We realised that if this line was accepted as representing the Commission's views on the subject, our delegation would have an uphill task for we would have to argue on two fronts—against the Commission and also against the opposite delegation. After the adjournment, we presented our case against the acceptance of this line. We referred the Commission to its terms of reference which required it to help the two sides to reach an agreement and not to arbitrate between them. In this context, it was not correct for the Commission to present a line

representing its views on the points in dispute. We, however, agreed to accept Delvoie's line as a notional line to form the basis for discussion but not a line representing the Commission's views as such. It was very much like arguing a case in a court of law. Our arguments ultimately prevailed despite the opposition from the other side and the Commission accepted our contention. This acceptance was a tactical victory for us and it augured well for our further deliberations.

Before examining the course of further discussions at this conference and the agreement finally reached, we might consider the principles which determined the delineation of the cease-fire line. These were as follows:

(a) Factual positions of the two sides as on the 1st of January 1949, irrespective of previous positions held earlier during operations, had to be the basis for delineating the cease-fire line.
(b) Routes for facilitating administration of outlying outposts had to be borne in mind and where necessary minor adjustments made to facilitate the maintenance of outposts.
(c) As Jammu and Kashmir State had legally acceded to India, any no-man's land as such, should be made inclusive to India. Although this was not specifically accepted as a principle, this was in actual fact followed when the whole of Lolab and Tilel valleys were made inclusive to us.

In the light of the above principles we now proceeded to discuss the 400 mile long line in great detail. Certain features in Patrara area near Munawar in the South were in dispute. Pakistan maintained that we had occupied these positions after the cease-fire. We proved that their claim was not correct. We quoted a signal sent by the Commander-in-Chief of Pakistan Army complaining about our presence in these areas on the 29th of December 1948. The Pakistan delegation was taken aback at the evidence now quoted by us and these features were ultimately made inclusive to us. We also similarly proved that certain po-

sitions in dispute around Jhangar were based on our factual positions on the date of the cease-fire and we should therefore be allowed to retain those features.

We had so far been doing very well in our discussions and I personally held high hopes of our being able to secure Pirkanthi and Ledigalli, the two 10,000 feet high features immediately south of Uri. The former, it would be recalled, was captured by the Gorkhas in June 1948 after a difficult uphill assault. Pirkanthi and Ledigalli were both being disputed. Due to severe winter conditions and maintenance difficulties we had withdrawn our troops from these positions in early December 1948 after a heavy snowfall in this area. We had, however, been sending patrols to these positions up to late December and these positions were unoccupied till then. Cease-fire was ordered on the 1st of January and our first patrol to these positions after the cease-fire in late January had found Pakistan troops in position on them. We maintained that morally these features belonged to us and further that Pakistan troops had perhaps occupied these positions after the cease-fire. Pakistan, on the other hand, claimed that they found these positions unoccupied in late December 1948 and occupied them before the cease-fire. Sher Khan produced evidence to prove that these two hills were accessible during the winter from Pakistan-held territory in the south as there was comparatively less snow on their southern approaches than on the approaches from our side. It was ultimately decided that these two hills be made inclusive to Pakistan. In view of bigger issues at stake in other sectors we felt that it would be advisable to have a certain amount of give and take before coming to discuss them. They were not physically held by us on the date of cease-fire and we could not convincingly refute Pakistan's contention that the Pak forces were in possession of these features on that date.

We moved further north along Delvoie's "notional line" resolving various minor disputes as the discussions progressed. Lolab valley lying north of Handwara, famed for its timber and its poultry came for heated discussion. We claimed a line along the Kishenganga and Pakistan wanted

the line further south along the factual positions as they then were in July 1949. Pakistan argued that in this sector she had operated on the Kishenganga during the operations and that we had entered the Lolab valley after the cease-fire. We, on the other hand, maintained that this valley was a no man's land because Pakistan troops had withdrawn north during the winter just as we had done in the case of Pirkanthi and Ledigalli. Linked with the dispute about Lolab valley was the question of Tilel valley lying further to the east which we maintained was also no man's land on the date of the cease-fire. There was, besides, another major dispute about Pakistan troops being south of Burzilbai Pass towards Gurais. One of our small patrols from Gurais had reported the area up to this pass clear of the enemy on the 28th of December 1948. Sher Khan admitted that Pakistan troops had been withdrawn north of Burzilbai Pass on the 25th of December 1948 but would not accept the contention that this area was no man's land. He maintained that before withdrawal Pakistan troops had armed the locals and enlisted them as irregulars and as such, this area was being dominated by Pakistan. We argued that our patrol to Burzilbai Pass had not encountered any opposition from these "irregulars" as it should have if they were armed and if this area was really under Pakistan's domination. This led to a long discussion on patrol tactics and Cawthorn tried to bring out that in war enemy patrols are not always ambushed or dealt with. They may at times be allowed to operate only with a view to getting a larger enemy force in the trap when it attempts to move into an area reported clear by its patrols.

There was heated discussion at our conference over Lolab and Tilel valleys and the Burzilbai Pass. Rumours of the breakdown of our talks had also started appearing in the papers. I remember, about this time, we had all been invited to a private dinner party—our only private engagement during our stay at Karachi, the remaining functions being all official or semi-official—at the residence of Brigadier Shahid Hamid of the Pakistan Army who was then Commandant of Pakistan National Guards. Nazir Ahmed and Sher Khan of the Pakistan delegation were

also present at this dinner. We spent a pleasant evening together without any trace of the heated discussions we were then having at the conference which had virtually reached a deadlock. While we were at dinner, a telephone call was received from Abbotabad. The waiter announced that the call was from Nazir Ahmed's GSO 1. Nazir Ahmed promptly disappeared and was talking to his GSO 1 from behind closed doors for an unusually long time. On his return he tried to explain that the call was from his wife. We knew full well that the idea of a telephone call from his wife was perhaps an afterthought. I guessed that the call was perhaps in connection with a sharp encounter in Tithwal sector the previous day when the Pakistanis had attempted to come into our area. We had already received intimation of this clash through our channels. With our discussions at Karachi having almost reached a deadlock and a serious incident of cease-fire violation having taken place in Tithwal area, some people anticipated that hostilities may commence again. If they did, it would have been rather awkward for us to have our Army Commander, our divisional commander of the Kashmir Valley and our Director of Military Operations detained at Karachi! We tried to continue the "pleasant conversation" at dinner that night but the atmosphere had noticeably become a little strained after the telephone call.

As we could not reach any agreement on the major points during discussions, it was decided to have an adjournment during which active lobbying went on behind the scenes. Shrinagesh took the opportunity of flying to Delhi for a day to obtain the Prime Minister's ruling over certain matters in dispute. When the conference reassembled after the adjournment, the two delegations appeared to be more prepared to concede to an extent the demands of the opposite side. It was ultimately decided that Lolab and Tilel valleys would be given to India and the area south of Burzilbai Pass would be a demilitarised zone supervised by United Nations Observers. To facilitate maintenance of Pakistan posts and as a *quid pro quo* to our getting the first half of the Kishenganga river in the Tilel valley, it was decided that the Kishenganga river

on the northern edge of Lolab valley should be made inclusive to Pakistan. This decision meant that Pakistan was allowed the use of the river and the track running parallel to it in that sector. To cater for the security of this line of communication, Pakistan was also given a line of low hills about a mile south of the river.

Once agreement was reached over these three major issues in dispute we found it easy to resolve the other differences. Finally, on the 27th of July 1949, after ten days of daily discussions, the agreement was drawn up. The draft of the agreement had to be retyped several times before it was approved by both sides. The agreement was signed well after midnight by the Chairman and the leaders of the two delegations in the presence of their tired members who in one or two cases were yawning! I for one felt that I required to catch up with lost sleep badly after these ten tiring days. We had been attending daily meetings from morning to evening and the time after the meetings was spent in official parties followed by despatch of reports and preparation of briefs for the following day. As the secretary of the delegation it had been my unenviable task to draft daily reports to Delhi about the progress of the conference and to prepare briefs for discussions on the following day. Our delegation used to hold a preliminary meeting every morning before the full dress conference.

Having at last successfully concluded our deliberations, we departed from Karachi on the 28th morning. Pakistan's Air Commander-in-Chief, Air Marshal Atcherly, had very kindly placed the Governor General's private plane at our disposal for our return to Delhi. After waiting at Mauripur airfield for a couple of hours, we had to finally abandon hopes of journeying through the air in the luxurious airliner of the head of Pakistan State. The ground-crew reported some engine defects in the plane and Atcherly apologised to Shrinagesh. We were instead given an Air Force Dakota with hard bucket seats. I must say it was quite a climb down from the Governor General's plane to this Dakota, but when one is very tired even bucket seats are a luxury!

While in the plane I tried to reflect on our recent agreement which had gained for us new territories in which we had never before operated—400 square miles of Lolab valley and the 200 square miles of Tilel valley. Except for one small post that we had to evacuate on the Kishenganga to facilitate Pakistan using the route for the maintenance of her troops, we had to evacuate no other position held by us. The problem in our case was now to move troops into new areas gained at this conference rather than to withdraw from anywhere. Pakistan, on the other hand, had to evacuate innumerable positions then held by her troops. This implied a tacit acceptance of the fact that she had infiltrated into areas in violation of the spirit of the cease-fire. It is true that on the debit side we had to accept the fact that we could not get Pirkanthi and Ledigalli, or that in a few cases as at Punch and Kargil the cease-fire line did not suit all our requirements. One cannot always have everything one's own way at an international conference. However, from the point of view of ordinary economics, the loss of these features in face of our large gains elsewhere was readily acceptable.

With these thoughts in my mind I dozed off to sleep in the plane to wake up only to put on the safety belt as the plane was approaching in to land at Palam airport. Our mission to Karachi had been successful and an agreed cease-fire line had been drawn on the map. Unfortunately, the exchange of prisoners was not part of the 13th of August resolution as such, and had, therefore, not been included in the cease-fire agreement. The two sides ultimately agreed to exchange their prisoners a year later and as the Brigade Major at Amritsar I found that our brigade was given the welcome task of taking over our prisoners at the border and arranging a suitable reception for them.

Looking out of the window of my plane which was then circling over the airfield, I could recognise the familiar landmarks of Delhi. Our plane descended lower and I could now see familiar faces waiting to receive us at the airfield. As I stepped out of the plane with my briefcase

carrying the text of the Karachi agreement, I felt a sense of great satisfaction. Nearly two years earlier from the same airport I had despatched Rai and his troops, and now I was stepping on to the same airfield after having witnessed the "finis" curtain being drawn over these operations.* But above all, the sense of satisfaction and relief came from the fact that I was happy to be back home again.

*Later events have proved that I was wrong in visualizing that peace had been finally restored in Kashmir. Infiltrations and cease-fire violations were to continue to be the order of the day and wars with Pakistan were to erupt again in this theatre in 1965 and 1971.

8

Postscript

THREE YEARS later, on a 13,000 feet high snow-covered picquet. First light is about to dawn in this semiarctic region of the remote North, the northern-most part of India. The Sun's "left hand" has caught these hill-tops in a "nose of light". The 26,000 feet high Nanga Parbat towering above all the neighbouring mountains is also getting gradually illumined. Nanga, as we used to familiarly call it, now looks like a large ship majestically anchored on an ocean of mountains. Having hitherto defied all human endeavour to disturb its isolation, it holds its head aloft with great pride.*

The Sun's morning rays have given the entire surroundings a goldentinge. One feels one is witnessing the dawn of creation. No signs of life nor any chirping of birds. Nature's natural grandeur, unaffected by human efforts, lies in front of us. Undisturbed and unconcerned, these hill-tops begin to change their golden hue to the sparkling shine of their snowy surface.

I sit pensively in my bunker with my rifle close to me thinking of the past, the present and the future. I think of that dramatic night on the 26th of October 1947 when we despatched Rai by air to Srinagar... of my leisurely drinking a mug of tea with Som Sharma at the airfield and later Som getting killed on the outskirts of Srinagar...

*Nanga Parbat was later conquered by a German mountaineering expedition.

of Russell so rightly attaching importance to the defence of Srinagar airfield, of his cheerfully accepting his recommendations regarding advance to Domel and later on remaining committed at Punch being overruled... of Usman's defence of Naushera and his subsequent signal, "am still in the world of living", sent a few hours before he was killed... of Cariappa's complete indifference to the enemy sniping at Mahura and mortaring at Tithwal, of his firm determination to relieve Leh before the winter in late 1948 and his decision to launch the assault on Zoji La despite all the hazards... of our summer offensive and the article in Pakistan Times... of besieged Punch and its final link-up... of the Lamas at their prayer wheels in the gompa at Leh... of my exciting and exacting trek back from Matayan to Zoji La... of the meeting in Prime Minister's room prior to the Karachi conference... of the ten days of endless discussions at Karachi and the final agreement signed after midnight... and finally of our enthusiastic reception of our returning prisoners at Amritsar. All these were now matters of the past, matters on which I could reminiscence sitting on these lonely hill-tops.

The "present" is to be spent in nature's idyllic background protecting India's remote frontier in the North along the cease-fire line. We are being feted with nature's natural grandeur but have also to be prepared to brave the ferocious onslaughts of the elements. The half hour daily morning "stand to" is now over and Punras Pun, my Havildar Major, a stocky sturdy Gorkha with pronounced Mongolian features, whispers if we could "stand down". I nod my head in approval and the men retire to the comfort of their blankets leaving a sentry with each light machine-gun. Inscrutable are the ways of Providence! Who could have ever imagined that the tranquility of these parts would be disturbed by the dull daily routine of a forward area during truce.

As for the future, well, it would be for the future historian to assess our intervention in Kashmir to rescue the people, in the light of future developments. The second phase of the 13th of August resolution still remains to be implemented and the third phase not yet completed with

large areas remaining under Pakistan's illegal occupation. As I am thinking of what the future may have in store, I hear footsteps on the snow approaching my bunker. I look up to see Abdul Karim coming towards me. He had been with us on this picquet all these months and was now proceeding home. Yes, he must have come to say good-bye for he was leaving our service. A loyal and hard-working porter, Karim had now decided to settle in some business with his relatives at Srinagar. His village had been burnt by the raiders during the 1947 invasion. He has, however, now accumulated his savings to start a fresh life in the town. He is quite excited about his proposed visit to Srinagar. This would be the first time that he would be venturing out to that "far off" city. He innocently inquires if Srinagar is the biggest city in the world. I reply that Srinagar is a big city, much bigger than his village in the valley below, but there are several bigger cities in the world. And then he casually mentions that he would give his vote in the village today to decide who would rule Srinagar. It dawns on me that elections to the Kashmir Constituent Assembly are being held. And it was for the freedom of the common man in Kashmir that the Indian Army had undertaken these operations. Karim is one such common man who has been able to rehabilitate himself after the enemy's pillage and plunder. He is now on his way to peace and prosperity. Soon he starts walking down the hill, merrily singing a folk song. I feel all our efforts and sacrifices have been worth while for we have brought peace and happiness to the common man in Jammu and Kashmir on our side of the cease-fire line. He now enjoys full democratic rights, which continue to be denied to his counterpart in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.* To us at the picquet, Karim is the symbol of that common man. One feels inspired in those remote surroundings with confidence in the future. It certainly holds great promise for Kashmir. Winter is fast approaching and it is now time for our picquet to withdraw to the valley below. As we pull out

* First elections were held in POK only in October 1970.

from our picquet we bid adieu to Nanga Parbat. We also raise our hands in salute as we pass the grave of one of our fallen comrades at the foot of our picquet. There are several such graves of the "unknown soldier" on these remote mountains. As I go past this grave, I think with admiration and pride of these dead heroes who gave their lives so that their countrymen in Kashmir may live in freedom.

En route to the valley below, we suddenly run into a snow blizzard. We lose our mules which slip down into the gorge along with our warm clothes and blankets. We grope in the dark to locate our track, which has now been obliterated by heavy snowfall. After hours of hazardous search in the dark, where one false step would mean a fall of several thousand feet in the gorge below, one of my Lance Naiks, Bhawan Singh Thapa, locates with the help of his bayonet the telephone line buried in the snow. This telephone line guides us on the track which takes us to a hut without a roof. Here we take shelter against the blizzard outside, and we spend 24 hours huddled together at a height of 12,000 feet in late November without a single blanket—the most gruelling 24 hours I have ever known.

The blizzard lifts and bright sunshine dawns again. We come out of our hideout to continue our journey "home". My platoon commander, Jamadar Sattajit Pun, inquires if the men can sing as they march. I readily give the necessary permission. Soon those snow-clad hills echo the tunes of a Gorkhali song sung by the ever cheerful Gorkhas:

India ko raja le Kashmir ko dhawaile,
Urai layo rail ko hawa le.
Dhalki dhalki na hindnu hola,
Yo kali ma jiu janu ber chhaina

(The King of India has sent us to the battlefield of Kashmir on the "wings" of the railway train. Do not walk with a swank for it does not take long to lose one's life in this world of today.)

Appendices

Soldiering at Thirteen Thousand*

Introduction

PRIOR TO 1947 operations in Kashmir, the Himalayan heights enjoyed complete seclusion, interrupted only occasionally by keen mountaineers. These mountaineers interested themselves in scaling the highest peaks, and the not-so-high hill-tops rarely received their attention. Moreover, they confined themselves to visits only—they came and went. They did not stay at these heights for any length of time. Operations in Kashmir and the cease-fire thereafter have, however, altered this position. Living on snow-capped hills has become a regular feature for the troops in this theatre.

Soldiering at these heights has taught us some useful lessons. I have endeavoured to reflect on some of these lessons I learnt during operations in 1947-48 and later after the cease-fire during my stay on a 13,000 feet picquet. These reflections may provide some food for thought and hence this article. These have been considered under four headings:

(a) Tactics.
(b) Training.
(c) Man Management.
(d) Administration.

Tactics

Defence. I have often heard commanders at the battalion or company level voicing their worries regarding the wide frontage they are called upon to hold. My own company had to guard a ten miles frontage and this used

*Reproduced from an article by the author published in the 1952 issue of the *Infantry Journal*.

to give me some uneasy moments. Compare this to General Eisenhower's contention that he was thin on the ground during the Ardennes counter-offensive—only one division for every ten miles—and then you will appreciate the apprehensions of the company commander. However, there is one aspect we are apt to ignore if we are not fully attuned to mountain warfare. On mountains, frontages are measured in terms of approaches and not in terms of their width. This is more so in the case of higher mountains. Hence, depending upon the number of approaches it may be in order for a company to hold a frontage of ten miles!

Defensive positions on these hill-tops have all the advantages of ground. Approaches to them are always limited and difficult. There are seldom any covered approaches to these barren objectives—the tree line is several thousand feet below. By day, the attacker must form up in full view of the defender who has the benefit of an "aerial view" from his dominating heights. The defender's wide observation can rarely be nullified by a smoke screen. Moreover, the atmospheric conditions are not conducive to the laying of such a screen. It follows, therefore, that a well-sited defended locality can hold out against much superior numbers—a platoon against a battalion is not an exaggerated ratio.

Attack. From an attacker's point of view also, operations at these heights provide interesting lessons. Objectives will normally be dominating hill-tops, difficult to scale and difficult to by-pass. Infantry assaulting these objectives will be very vulnerable to hostile fire. This disadvantage can only be countered by either night operations or by preponderant fire support, but as we shall presently see, these are both difficult propositions.

Night operations may provide tactical surprise which otherwise is well nigh impossible to achieve but they are hazardous undertaking at these heights. Difficulties of climate and terrain do not favour movement by night. The narrow and limited approaches along mountain tracks will seldom allow room for manoeuvre to assaulting troops and these approaches will inevitably be covered by the defender's fixed line fire. Similarly preponderant fire

support will be difficult to arrange. The terrain generally precludes the employment of tanks or heavy artillery pieces. Fire support from ground weapons will be confined to the 3.7 howitzer or the 3-inch mortars and transportation difficulties will considerably limit the quantity of ammunition that can be made available for either.

Close air support, with no limitations of terrain, may provide an effective answer for securing preponderant fire support. If our own Air Forces have air superiority, then it should not be difficult to provide such air support. As objectives would be dominating hill-tops of the surrounding area, the neighbouring ridges may not interfere with the fly-in or fly-out of aircraft. Further, hostile anti-aircraft fire will be confined to machine-guns only as the terrain may not permit the use of anti-aircraft guns. Weather conditions will, of course, considerably affect flying but at these heights they equally affect ground operations. It would thus appear necessary to arrange for intimate army/air co-operation for set piece attacks and there is a case for alloting air tentacles down to battalion level which may even be suballotted to rifle companies. Such decentralisation of air resources may appear revolutionary to the orthodox military mind but under such circumstances it is a necessity which must be met.

Weather. Weather always plays an important part in military operations but at these heights its importance is greatly enhanced. Here, the weather can assume a very savage complexion, completely crippling all operations. As a general rule, winter is the closed season for operations at these heights. During these months there is over 30 feet of snow on the hill-tops and the danger of avalanches is ever present. Therefore, by November, troops on either side start going down to the valleys below where they remain till April or May, when the race for the hill-tops starts again.

Even during the summer, from May to November, weather considerably influences the course of operations. It continues to remain unpredictable. Generally, however, mornings are calm but by midday bitter cold winds sweep these heights making movement really difficult. Moreover

the proportion of cloudy days accompanied by hail and snow is much higher than sunny days. It is not abnormal to have weeks of hail and snow continuously. We used to regard the occasional bright sunny day as a real blessing.

Planners would be well advised to plan their operations for the mornings. We found that the best time to cross a wind-swept pass was at dawn, and dawn at these heights is earlier than on the plains. This morning formula can at best serve as a rough guide, as the weather here changes suddenly. It is also a very local affair. There may be hail and snow on one hill while the other hill may be having bright sunshine. All plans must, however, take meteorological forecasts into careful consideration and these should preferably be local forecasts. It is necessary for meteorological sections to be attached to the infantry brigades or battalions operating in the area.

Movement. As all mountaineers know, the shortest route on the hills is generally the most difficult. It normally entails steep climbs which in turn mean both fatigue and loss of time. The guiding factor in the selection of a route should be gradient and not distance. During operations, however, enemy dispositions may outweigh considerations of both gradient and distance. Infantry speed on these hills is inevitably slower than what one is used to. As a yardstick, we worked on two miles per hour, with an additional allowance of one hour for each 1,000 feet of climb. In the beginning, when troops are new to the area, even this modest speed is difficult to attain. Snow also has an important bearing on movement. Infantry speed is further reduced after a fresh snowfall when marching troops may find themselves knee-deep in snow. Another feature of marching in snow is the reliance one has to place on compasses. The familiar hills and valleys look so different when covered by snow and marching over them is very much like a night march. An important aspect of movement in snow is the necessity for safety precaution. When the snow starts thawing, the danger of avalanches is very great. At this stage it is advisable to confine one's movements to early mornings when the Sun's heat is not strong enough to melt the snow and when there is no strong wind.

One should also avoid leeward slopes of hills and slopes of 30 degrees or more.

Judging distance. Judging distance becomes difficult unless one is used to these heights. I remember that the nullah below our picquet would often be judged by a newcomer as 400 feet whereas in actual fact it was nearer 1,600 feet. This optical illusion may be due to the rarefied atmosphere but is certainly something to contend with in tactical planning.

Range of weapons. Yet another interesting tactical feature is the enhanced range of all weapons. There being considerably less resistance in the air, the rifle or LMG bullets can exceed their maximum range. I found that we could get good results on targets at 400 yards by keeping the backsight at 350 yards. This may not be of much importance to the gunner who takes meteorology into account before his shoot, but for the infantry it is a factor of importance. However, it is interesting to know that the maximum range of 25-pounder guns gets increased by 400 yards.

Training

Living conditions at these heights are ever so different from what an average soldier is used to. There is a lot to learn about the snow and the heights. Troops require specialised training before they can efficiently operate at these heights. During the war in Burma we had special jungle training divisions. Similarly, a training formation or unit is required for troops going up to these hills. Here they can be made familiar with the conditions under which they would be required to operate.

Physical toughening up should form the most important item in the syllabus for this training. Whether assaulting across steep climbs or manning a picquet in such extreme climate, the physical toughness of the individual soldier will be the most important battle winning factor. Another important aspect to be stressed in the syllabus should be the training of the junior leaders. Company and platoon commanders may often find themselves in independent

command and their actions may considerably influence the course of battle.

Man Management

During periods of truce, man management acquires special significance. The soldier continues to serve under field conditions but the excitement of battle is absent. He has now enough time to brood and reflect. Man management, therefore, is put to severe test under these conditions. My observations on man management are primarily applicable to post-cease-fire period in Kashmir but most of them may apply equally to the period of active operations.

Three factors affect man management at these heights. These are: hardships, isolation and lack of recreation. I need hardly elaborate on the first factor for it is apparent that soldiering under these conditions entails considerable physical hardships. Severe winter conditions prevail at these heights all the year round. The summer months here are colder than the winter of our plains. Troops living in "sangars" or bunkers on these wind-swept hill-tops have not only to contend with climatic hardships but also with hardships caused by tactical considerations. Picquets are seldom more than a platoon strong and they require to have a sentry for each section in addition to the normal patrols. Thus, the average rifleman cannot have the normal night's rest in bed every third day.

Secondly, there is an acute sense of isolation. Troops on the picquets are far away from any habitation. Even the battalion headquarters may be anything up to twelve hours' strenuous march from the picquets. Visitors are naturally few and far between. Weeks, nay months, may elapse before one can meet anyone other than from one's own picquet. Letters take weeks in transit and at the best of times it is difficult to arrange more than two deliveries a week. It is also impracticable to have amenity wireless sets on picquets. There may not be enough sets to go round. Even if sets are procured it is not easy to arrange for charging of batteries unless each picquet is provided

with a charging set.* It is not unnatural, therefore, that a sense of isolation creeps over the soldier living under these conditions. I felt while living on these picquets, that I could far more justifiably claim to belong to a "forgotten army" than I ever did whilst serving in Burma. The winter months, when line of communication is blocked with snow for six months, are much worse from the point of view of this feeling of isolation.

Thirdly, there is lack of recreation. Besides a game of cards or some such indoor game inside the bunker, troops have little recreation. Outdoor games are, of course, out of the question as there is no ground for these. If one is lucky and has a flat patch of ground on one's picquet one can play deck tennis but this may not always be possible.

As a junior commander one can by sympathetic understanding and genuine endeavour, offset some of the handicaps of man management on account of hardships, isolation and lack of recreation. A few measures which may gain good results are as follows:

(a) Officers at company level must always live on picquet with their men and share the hardships of picquet life. A company may be split into platoon picquets but it is better for the company commander to stay with his platoon by turn instead of remaining in the valley below.

(b) Officers must frequently visit picquets. Frequency of these visits will, of course, depend on the number of picquets, the distance involved and the weather. As a company commander with some five picquets,† I found it difficult to visit all my picquets more than once in two weeks. The battalion commander who may have several more picquets spread over 30 to 40 miles may not be able to visit them more than once in three months.

(c) Troops must not be split up below platoon level.

*This was written before transistors became available in plenty.

† I had an additional militia company under my command.

Shortage of troops and tactical necessity may require section picquets but this must be avoided as far as possible. Section picquets mean a greater strain on the men for duties and are not good for morale.

(d) Organised rest camps should be provided in the valley below. Picquets can each send two or there men at a time for a week's rest. The "rest roster" should be carefully worked out and officers should take their turn on the roster with their men. It may not be possible for officers to be able to go down as often as their men, but in no case should an officer avail of more chances than his men.

(e) Picquets should be changed round once in two or three months so that the change in environment may relieve the monotony of the surroundings.

(f) Men should be kept busy. Training programme including indoor training in bunkers should be drawn up. Education and map reading should be given particular attention. Apart from filling in the day's programme with something which under such conditions will interest the soldier, this helps him in securing higher classifications which in turn means better rates of pay.

(g) Special arrangements should be made for prompt and regular postal service. When the road is closed or when it is blocked with snow, air drops may be arranged. These air drops cannot take place over picquets but can be carried out over battalion headquarters in the valley.

(h) Special arrangements need also to be made for disseminating news to the men. This may be done through the medium of news-sheets prepared in battalion headquarters, and passed over the telephone.

(i) Each picquet must have a gramophone with an adequate supply of gramophone records. A very liberal scale of indoor games and reading material is also required.

These are only a few suggestions which should help in man management. The most important thing is that commanders should realise that man management under these

conditions needs their special attention. If the soldier is convinced that his commander appreciates his difficulties, he is sharing them with him as also he is doing his best to minimise them, more than half the battle is won.

Administration

Medical. This is the most important aspect of administration at these heights. Expert medical assistance may not be readily available and this fact together with adverse weather conditions increase the responsibilities of the junior commander. A medical pamphlet on the lines of a first aid booklet will be a useful guide for him.

It is essential for every individual going to these heights to be thoroughly examined. Particular attention should be given to the heart and to blood pressure during this examination. After this medical screening, individuals should be gradually introduced to these heights.*

The question of giving oxygen masks to troops operating at these heights is often discussed. One may venture to introduce a layman's point of view on a technical matter. Whereas lack of oxygen in the air is a serious handicap, I feel that this could best be overcome by gradual acclimatisation. Apart from an oxygen mask being too cumbersome to carry at all times, it is also fraught with great danger. If it goes out of order a man may find it difficult to adjust himself to the sudden change. His system, not having been progressively initiated to the rarefied atmosphere, may break down at the suddenness of such a change. The human system has great powers of adaptability and if the change is gradual it soon reconciles itself to new conditions. Admittedly, the first few days at these heights are a trifle uncomfortable and one suffers from headache and sleeplessness but these are only temporary. From my own experience I found that I could climb up to 16,000 feet without any oxygen. I have also known of several

*In the Sixties acclimatisation schedules came to be drawn up for all troops being inducted to high altitude. In 1952 when this was written, this arrangement had not been introduced.

people having similarly climbed up to 19,000 feet.*

There are three other hazards to the health of troops at these heights. These are: electrocution, blindness and frost-bite.† Though these pose serious problems, they are preventible and it is the responsibility of the junior commander to ensure that his troops take proper precautions against them.

Lightning is a very common phenomenon at these heights particularly during July and August. There have been several cases of men being electrocuted by lightning. Its severity can be gauged from the fact that even a bunch of keys gets charged with electricity as I once found when I had them in my trouser's pocket. During lightning, rifles get charged with electricity and the tip of the bayonet may eject sparks. On such occasions one should not touch iron in any form. There should, of course, be lightning conductors at each picquet. If it is a large picquet, then two or three conductors may be required. It may not be possible to have proper lightning conductors but one can improvise with equally good results. We used signal cables on poles with their ends buried in the ground.

Secondly, snow blindness is a painful affliction which may lead to permanent blindness. It can, however, be avoided if one uses snow goggles. A black or dark coloured handkerchief covering the eyes is a good substitute and it does not impair one's vision. Without goggles or handkerchief, one cannot keep one's eyes open in the dazzling sunlight reflected on the glistening snow.

Lastly, frost-bite, which in advanced stages can only be cured by amputation, can be completely eliminated by strict discipline. Troops must regularly apply mineral jelly to their feet and must on no account be allowed to go near fire immediately after any part of their body has got wet. It is dangerous to go about with wet socks. As soon as socks

*Later in 1966, as a battalion commander, I often operated at altitudes upto 18,000 feet and did not find any necessity for oxygen.

†In 1952 when I wrote this, pulmonary odema had not been heard of. Nowadays, this is regarded as the most serious hazard to health at these altitudes.

get wet they should be changed and dry ones put on. Like malaria in Burma, frost-bite at these heights should be treated as a "court of inquiry offence".

Another important medical lesson is that picquets must have adequate provisions and facilities to hold casualties until such time as these casualties are fit to travel.* The regimental aid post may be a perilous journey over steep mountain tracks. Doctors may have to come up to see patients instead of patients being evacuated to them for treatment.

Maintenance. The outstanding lesson with regard to maintenance is that each position must be self-contained and must hold adequate reserves. For the winter, troops will have to hold six months' reserves of all items in the valley as the roads across the passes would be blocked with snow. This stocking has to be completed during the summer months. Similarly, in summer, picquets must also hold adequate reserves. The line of communication can be interrupted due to bad weather for weeks at a time. We had fourteen days' reserve and fourteen days' running stocks of all items at each picquet. Such reserves not only cater for the vagaries of nature but also for operational eventualities. It is important to remember that air drops on picquets are not always possible and unless troops hold adequate reserves there is a grave risk of their being starved of essential supplies.

We also found it necessary to have a dozen ponies and porters for each picquet. These were required to bring firewood and drinking water from 3,000 to 4,000 feet below. Water and fuel have to be brought not only for running use but also for stocking so that they can be used on rainy days when their collection may be difficult. It is impracticable to detail troops manning the picquets, for their collection as it would mean seriously impairing the fighting strength of the picquet.

Rations. Food appears to lose taste at these heights and requires to be supplemented by a liberal allowance of

*In 1952 we had not begun to use helicopters which have now largely solved the problem of evacuation of casualties from inaccessible areas.

"chillies and spices". In spite of my having no particular liking for chillies, I found I could not have any meal without at least a couple of them! As a means of adding taste to the food, it is necessary to make special provision for sauce or chutneys in the men's rations.

Cooking is a difficult operation on these picquets. It takes six to eight hours to cook "dal" and similarly other items also require considerably longer time. Use of pressurised cookers, however, reduces the time taken in cooking. It is amazing how soon food gets cold at these heights. I often found that even on a sunny day the dal or curry would freeze in less than five minutes from the time they were removed from the oven. The best way to serve hot food is to allow men to eat their food in the kitchen or near a burning fire.

A very important requirement in troops' rations which doctors agree is a medical necessity, is the daily issue of rum. Two ounces of rum a day per individual formed our daily ration but this was really not enough. To advocate an increase in this scale, in these days of prohibition, may not seem right but we felt that this quota should be doubled.* I am sure the most ardent advocate of prohibition will be readily converted after he spends a day in the trying conditions on these picquets.

Clothing. I do not need to dwell in detail on the items of clothing that are required at these heights. We have already evolved a special scale—our snow scale of clothing, but it may be of interest to mention some of the important items:

(a) Sleeping bags are very useful. They give adequate warmth and the scale for every individual was one sleeping bag plus five blankets. In addition, we also had waterproof snow mattress which was a great boon when the ground was wet or damp.

*Although in 1952, I felt that the scale of ration rum should be increased, in 1967 I had revised my views on this point. I came to the conclusion that rum in large quantity was not desirable at high altitudes.

(b) Poshteen coats or leather jerkins with fur lining keep the body warm.* Gloves for the hands and balaclava caps for the ears and the nose were also very necessary.

(c) String vests are very useful to prevent perspiration and wet under-clothing which can cause pneumonia.

Research is, however, required for producing a suitable footwear for this climate. Ammunition boots cannot keep the feet warm and we often used to refer to them as "death traps". The fur-lined Gilgit boots afforded warmth but were too cumbersome and were not waterproof. We found canvas overboots worn over fur-lined bedroom slippers a satisfactory expedient. During long marches, ammunition boots are the only answer; the feet keeps warm by the increased circulation of blood.

Conclusion

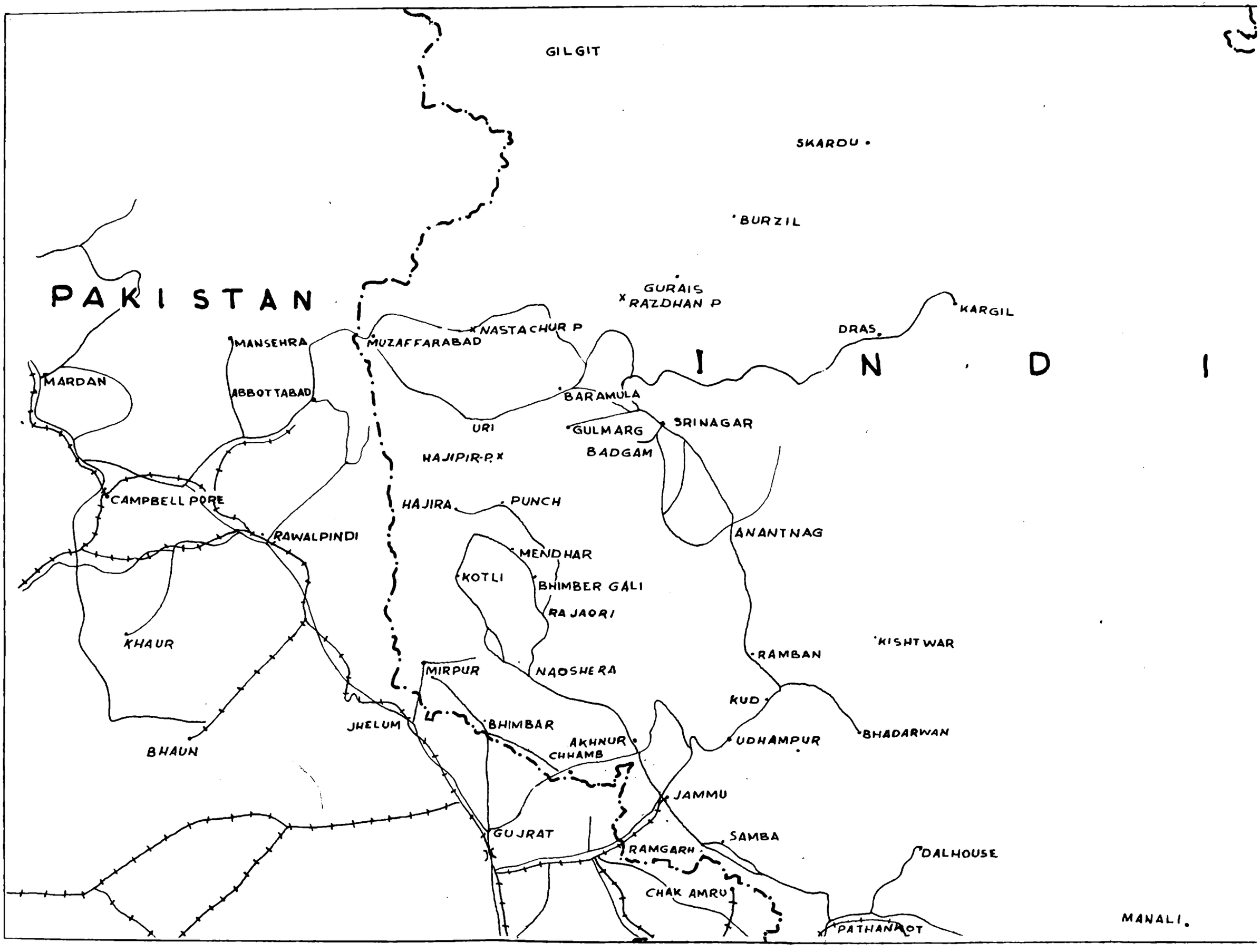
In the years gone by, 13,000 feet may have been considered a forbidden height for military operations but events in Kashmir have proved it otherwise. We, in the Indian Army, can ill-afford to ignore the lessons we have learnt in Kashmir as the Himalayas extend over 2,000 miles of our northern frontiers. This hitherto impassable barrier may not remain so impregnable in the future.† Not far from my picquet stood the majestic Nanga Parbat, the 26,000 feet peak which, like Mount Everest, still remains unconquered** I often wonder whether the soldiers of posterity would not one day find themselves operating over Nanga Parbat and Mount Everest.‡

*Coats parka now in use are of course a great improvement.

†Considering that this was written in 1952, this has a prophetic touch about it. As a nation our belief in the impregnability of the Himalayas got shattered in 1962.

** In 1952 when this article was written neither Mount Everest nor Nanga Parbat had been conquered.

‡This, of course, has not so far come true. However, in the Sixties we in the Indian Army found ourselves serving and operating at much higher altitudes than what we thought likely or possible in the Fifties.


GILGIT
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MARDAN
ABBOTTABAD
BARAMULA
URI
GULMARG
SRINAGAR
BADGAM
HAJIPIR-P
CAMPBELL PORE
HAJIRA
PUNCH
RAWALPINDI
ANANTNAG
MENDHAR
KOTLI
BHIMBER GALI
RAJAORI
KISHTWAR
KHAUR
RAMBAN
MIRPUR
NAOSHERA
KUD
JHELUM
BHIMBAR
BHADARWAN
AKHNUR
UDHAMPUR
BHAUN
CHHAMB
JAMMU
GUJRAT
SAMBA
RAMGARH
DALHOUSE
CHAK AMRU
MANALI
PATHANKOT

JAMMU & KASHMIR

SCALE 1 INCH TO 31·57 MILES

MILES 10 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 MILES

LEGEND

BOUNDARY INTERNATIONAL —·—·—·—

CHINA

GILGIT

SKARDU

BURZIL

GURAIS

RAZDHAN P

NASTACHUR P

AD

DRAS

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I N D I A

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BARAMULA

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AKHNUR

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About the Author

Major General S. K. Sinha was the General Staff Officer (Operations) of Western Command throughout the Kashmir War of 1947-49. In that capacity, he served under three successive Army Commanders in command of this theatre—Lt.-Gen. Sir Dudley Russell, Lt.-Gen. K. M. Cariappa and Lt.-Gen. S. M. Shrinagesh. His association with this campaign started on the 27th of October 1947 when he was put in charge of the dramatic despatch of troops by air to Srinagar, and continued till 1949, when he was the Secretary of the Indian delegation to the United Nations' Conference at Karachi, at which an agreed ceasefire line was drawn between India and Pakistan.